

Afterglow: Belonging, diversity, and emotional expression in barbershop
singing in Wellington, New Zealand

BY

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Abstract

Over the last three years, since the development of the Barbershop Harmony Society's "Everyone in Harmony" inclusivity and diversification initiative, barbershop singing networks have increasingly broken down systems of class, gender and race. Despite a history of conservative and traditionalist musical practice, I argue that participating in barbershop music offers singers in New Zealand opportunities to express themselves and create lasting relationships in increasingly diverse social contexts. In light of this, this thesis explores ideas of belonging, camaraderie, diversity and self-expression in barbershop music in New Zealand, through ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Vocal FX chorus, based in Wellington, New Zealand. This thesis works through these ideas in three ways: I consider historical context and discuss who gets to sing, belong or contribute to barbershop music; I then explore diversity and Māori and Pacific Island influence in barbershop in New Zealand; and I conclude with a discussion of performative emotional expression in the barbershop style, and how that contributes to free and healthy modes of self-expression in a predominantly homo-social male space. These threads combine to display how ideas of belonging – both to an ensemble and to a wider, global style of music – and camaraderie are complex and culturally nuanced concepts in barbershop music contexts. Furthermore, this research displays ways in which established socio-cultural norms in barbershop contexts can be challenged by ensembles working in this musical style. Ethnography, including personal reflection through performative auto-ethnography and memory, informs much of the thesis. I draw on conversations with singers and observations of rehearsals and contests for Vocal FX to narrate many of the ways in which barbershop music works in New Zealand.

Introduction

In the hours following the tragic act of terrorism in Christchurch in March 2019, Westminster Chorus, a successful barbershop chorus based in Westminster, California, shared a video of their ensemble and Vocal FX, from Wellington, singing “Pokarekare Ana” in the lobby of a hotel in Orlando, Florida in July 2018. The video shows men from seemingly opposite sides of the world banding together to enjoy a piece of music, a classic New Zealand song written to lament the distance between two lovers (with a particular reference to wartime). For Vocal FX, this song holds a special place as the ensemble often travels to the United States to compete in major competitions, leaving family, friends, and work behind for a period of time to do so. In the video, men who don’t know each other are arm-in-arm, and seem to be enjoying each other’s time, friendship, and music. The video has since been shared over social media, and even made it onto some New Zealand news websites in the days after the terrorist attack, as it offered a chance for people to find solace and comfort in music. At the time of writing, the clip shared from Westminster Chorus’s Facebook page had amassed over 542,000 views over the course of nine months.

At the time of the recording, this sing-through was a poignant one for those involved, as both choruses were reeling somewhat following disappointing placings in the Barbershop Harmony Society International Chorus Contest, held earlier that day. Westminster Chorus, a frequent winner and former Choir of the World in 2009, came 2nd to Vocal Majority from Texas, while Vocal FX placed 9th – three places lower than their previous appearance at the contest – despite their highest score ever. Contests are followed by an “afterglow” – a social event in which people at a barbershop convention get together and mingle, celebrating music with friends both new and old. An “afterglow” often involves singing – either shared repertoire or, more commonly, the teaching of tags (the concluding fragment of a barbershop arrangement). This “afterglow”, having initially been a less-than-exuberant one for Vocal FX, became something much more significant when Westminster Chorus passed through. Singers from each group were conversing, introducing each other, singing tags, and having a great time. As Westminster had toured New Zealand in 2014 and 2017, there was a link between members of both groups. As part of their tours, they had learned an arrangement of “Pokarekare Ana” as a form of engagement with New Zealand’s indigenous culture. Given

Vocal FX's knowledge of the song (either formally or informally as New Zealanders), a member of Westminster stepped forward to conduct a version of the song as sung by both groups together. It is funny to think about it now – having been one of the singers in the room that night in Orlando – that such joy and feelings of camaraderie and belonging emanated from an evening prefaced by collective competitive disappointment. Barbershop music, at its higher levels of proficiency, is inherently predicated on scores and competition but, in reality, it is these moments of collective musicking outside of contest contexts that stick in the memory. Furthermore, it is fascinating to consider that singing a song in consolation, with the explicit purpose of enjoying the company of the singers around us, could transcend its original purpose and provide solace for people online following a New Zealand tragedy. I remember a distinct feeling of brotherhood, belonging and sheer joy as I sang that night, and I realised that barbershop offered unique opportunities for men to find people they shared common interests and values with and contribute to something bigger than themselves. In my experience and research, barbershop provides this and more for many of the people involved.

In 2015, I moved from a small town of around 3500 people to New Zealand's capital city, Wellington. I was immediately daunted by a myriad of life factors that I hadn't had to consider up to that point in my life – new people, tertiary study, and a desire to continue singing, as I had my whole life. Within a week of living in Wellington, I met a member of Vocal FX (a person with whom, incidentally, I now travel the world singing in a quartet and chorus) who invited myself and two of my friends along to a rehearsal. The rehearsal itself was daunting and largely intimidating to begin with – members of recently crowned International Quartet Champions Musical Island Boys had re-joined Vocal FX in directorial and advisory capacities, so there was an element of being starstruck by some of the best singers in this style in the world.

The telling moment of the first rehearsal actually came after the formalities concluded. As we were preparing to leave the rehearsal venue, two friends and I – all of us at our first Vocal FX rehearsal - were approached by a pair of singers within the chorus who suggested we sing a tag (a short fragment that concludes a barbershop arrangement). The tag was the end of an arrangement of the jazz standard "The Shadow of Your Smile", which featured a prolonged held note (or "post") and a dramatic, satisfying cadence to a major chord at the end. We were all taught our parts in equal turn by the chorus members – without sheet music of course, as

per the barbershop tradition of aural learning. We sang the tag and were immediately hooked on the style of singing. I distinctly remember the feeling of creating overtones through “locking” a four-part major chord, and the buzzing feeling generated by that. Enjoying that buzzing feeling acted as a social catalyst, as we befriended the singers who had taught us the tag and sang with us, and we are still friends to this day. Tag-singing culture provides an impetus to meet new people, produce ringing chords, and learn about harmonic movements and the roles of each voice part in barbershop harmony – all of which are exemplified in the experience I had.

In this thesis, I elucidate how barbershop music enriches the lives of its singers through generating camaraderie and belonging, and by providing a platform for its singers to emotionally express themselves. I also aim to question some of the ways in which barbershop music has handled this idea of “belonging” historically, and I argue that diasporic flow and progressive inclusivity initiatives have enhanced the musical style outside of its American hub. Barbershop music, as well as the social interactions and relationships that underpin it, is practiced and performed in increasingly diverse social contexts – especially in New Zealand where my research took place. In analysing diverse barbershop social contexts, this thesis examines the politics of difference, both in terms of mediating geographical difference through music, but also in how barbershoppers across spectrums of race, ethnicity, and gender navigate the complicated, historical baggage associated with barbershop singing and produce modernized, inclusive alternatives to historical narratives in this style. The inspiration for this project emanates from my own experiences as a barbershop singer, and from the array of life-affirming experiences I have had through singing this style of music.

In this introductory chapter, I consider how barbershop is viewed in popular culture, introduce social developments in barbershop contexts, establish my methodological approach to this research, and clarify some of the barbershop terminology used in this thesis. Barbershop does not project as a life-affirming art form – I want to challenge stigma around what this music is, who sings it, and why they sing it. There’s far more to this style of music than Dapper Dans in straw hats. Barbershop, in a popular culture sense, is caricatured in a way that pokes fun at the idea of singing in this style. The most prominent contemporary example of this is on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, where one of the recurring segments sees Fallon perform satirical barbershop arrangements of pop songs with a group

called “the Ragtime Gals”. While I was unable to reach anyone from *The Tonight Show* or NBC to discuss this further, there are quirky connotations coming from this quartet name. “Ragtime” tethers this ensemble to a particular era and sound intrinsically linked with early barbershop, while the “Gals” part of the name could be poking fun at gender or masculinity in barbershop. The group often extends beyond the traditional four singers and can include celebrity musical guests (recent examples include Weezer, the Backstreet Boys, Justin Timberlake, and Tina Fey). The group is typically dressed in stiped suits with straw hats and suspenders, perpetuating clichés around what barbershoppers look like. They also visually communicate some of the hand-waving stereotypes associated with the style. While these performances elevate barbershop performance into mainstream media and contribute to the “good old days” narrative embedded in barbershop’s history, they also downplay the musical and emotive qualities in barbershop music. I hope, through analysing elite barbershop performance, that this thesis contributes to ongoing processes of breaking down stereotypes of barbershop and its singers.

Additionally, questions of belonging appear when considering who gets to sing barbershop more generally. The Ragtime Gals’ performance of “Sexyback” with Justin Timberlake on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* ¹ shows five white men singing barbershop and is unintentionally symbolic of the majority race and gender demographics in barbershop contexts. The flipside to this observation is to consider who is not represented in “the Ragtime Gals”, and why. Barbershop carries historical baggage of an exclusionary nature and, as such, barbershop leaders and organizations are still apologising and working through their previous wrongdoings – largely pertaining to historical segregation based on race and gender. In the first chapter of this thesis, I question some of the exclusionary politics in barbershop historical contexts with particular reference to race, gender, and age. There has never been a better time to consider this, as barbershop pushes to diversify itself globally. Namely, Barbershop Harmony Society (the primary organization for barbershop singing globally) launched an inclusivity initiative in 2017, called “Everyone in Harmony”. The strategic vision is summarised on the Barbershop Harmony Society’s website as follows:

The gift of harmony is too wonderful for us to keep to ourselves. It is a gift that we are not only compelled to share, but one that we now have the capability, resources

¹ This performance can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD8tGWlqA-c>

and unity of purpose to share with everyone. We need to share it with young and old, with people of every color and every strata, with city people and country people and everyone in between, because the world needs what we have. Harmony compels us to blend, to cooperate, to create beauty. Indeed, to love each other. It's time to think of the gift of harmony not just as a treasure for our own enjoyment, but as a tool for direct social impact. (Barbershop Harmony Society, n.d.)

While there is some undoubtedly emotive language in this statement, it does carry a sense of ambition for engineering a diverse, open society of singers. I keep this vision in mind as I consider how barbershop is engaging with this process, and how different singers in different parts of the world (namely New Zealand and North America) approach this.

My fieldwork during the research period for this thesis changed the scope of the project from what I initially intended, which was to consider barbershop's role as a social catalyst for its singers. Instead, the trajectory of the research increasingly moved towards considering men's mental health, and the emotional side of barbershop performance based on the conversations I had with Vocal FX's singers. A number of questions arose from this change in approach - why do people choose to sing barbershop? What keeps them coming back to rehearsals with their ensemble? And what benefits can singing offer its practitioners as far as male emotional wellbeing and expression is concerned? This research contributes to the developing areas of research around music, the voice, and emotional expression, as well as contributing to the ongoing conversations around mental health support for men in New Zealand.

Overview

This thesis is in three parts. In Chapter 1, I discuss the politics of belonging in barbershop music. I analyse some of the histories of barbershop in North America and in New Zealand, and critique some of the exclusion that is prevalent in a historical account (or even, to an extent, in the present day) when writing about barbershop. In Chapter 2, I focus on the product of diasporic flow through considering barbershop in New Zealand. I primarily draw from a case study based on research conducted with Vocal FX chorus in Wellington, New Zealand. This chapter engages with ideas of indigeneity, diversity, and community, as well as posing challenges to the established American norms in this style of music. Finally, Chapter 3 engages with emotional expression and the challenges to traditional modes of masculinity

through considering how elite barbershop ensembles conceptualise emotion in their performance. This leads to discussions of embodiment and extra-musical benefits such as those that emanated from the brave and open conversations my interviewees shared with me during my research process.

Methodology and Ethics

This thesis relies extensively on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted with Vocal FX chorus in Wellington, New Zealand, over the course of four months in the middle of 2019. I have been a member of this ensemble for five years, so while there is a dedicated fieldwork period involved in my research, I also draw on my experiences of contributing to this chorus. One of the biggest resources I draw from throughout this thesis is *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (2008). I draw on chapters by Timothy Rice (p42-61) and Deborah Wong (p76-89) to discuss approaches to the insider/outsider complex, and to performative auto-ethnography.

Rice's chapter "Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology" considers the role of fieldwork in contemporary ethnomusicology, and questions where the "field" is in fieldwork, alongside discussing the insider/outsider complex in ethnography. Rice frequently points out how scholars can end up being in-between the position of insider or outsider and occupy neither during their research. In the context of this research, I consider myself to identify with this positionality – an insider within the localized context of the ensemble I belong to, as well as based on my knowledge and experience of singing and discussing barbershop, but an outsider in a global context based on matters of geography and age. In a more micro sense, each chapter of this thesis poses ways in which I might be fulfilling the "in-between" of the insider/outsider complex with relation to a range of topics. These topics include processes of cross-cultural engagement (i.e. respectful engagement with Māori and Pacific Island music as a Pākehā/European New Zealander), and emotional expression (i.e. as a young male who discusses his feelings and emotions with other men through conversation and through music). I develop these ideas with reference to Rice's chapter throughout the thesis.

The fixity of the insider/outsider complex attempts to simplify something much more multiplex or nuanced. Kirin Narayan's article "How Native Is a Native Anthropologist?" (1993)

illuminates alternative approaches to this conversation. Narayan proposes that “we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux” (Narayan 1993, 671). She continues by suggesting that it is not as simple as being “native” or “non-native” (or perhaps insider or outsider), given factors such as “education, gender, sexual orientation, class [and] race”. Instead, anthropologists should focus on “the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts” (672). I found this to be true when conducting my fieldwork with members of Vocal FX during 2019, as I found the quality of my existing friendships and the culture of the chorus to perpetuate my status (and that of my interviewees) as an insider within this cultural context. This transcends traditional ideas of insider and outsider complexes, given the diverse set of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented in my interviewees. My third chapter, in particular, draws from a deliberately diverse set of voices (both in terms of ethnicity and age within Vocal FX) so as to fully represent this.

The alternative view to this somewhat celebratory or wholesome discussion is to consider the bias that I may carry when conducting this research. While I am an insider in the context of Vocal FX, my perspective is inherently shaped by how profoundly meaningful this group (and the research by extension) is to me. I often share anecdotes – be they my own, or those of singers I interviewed – that are emotive and sentimental. I include these as I think these stories are important insofar as painting a picture of what it is to be in Vocal FX, and why singers continue to perform (and socialise) within that context. My perspective is also shaped by my position as a practising vocalist and contributor to the group, through the leadership role I carry within the chorus. I received ethics approval to conduct this research through Victoria University of Wellington’s Human Ethics Committee (#0000027523), a process which required me to consider each of these questions of power relationships, representation of diverse voices, and how I spoke to my interviewees. The singers who I interviewed during my research period volunteered to be part of this research after I addressed the chorus during a rehearsal in late June 2019. There are around 45-60 singers in Vocal FX at any given time – the number fluctuates between contest years, and tends to increase in years that the ensemble attends an international convention. The eleven singers I interviewed for this research represent a cross-section of age, ethnicity and barbershop experience within Vocal

FX, so as to provide an even or holistic view of the ensemble. These singers' names are anonymized in this thesis, so as to protect their identities and provide them opportunity to speak freely during the conversations we shared.

In any event, I do not mean to overlook issues that may arise, or to adopt a positionality of pure praise or positivity when discussing Vocal FX and barbershop. I make no reservations about wanting to celebrate my experience of barbershop music in this thesis, but I do wish to adopt a balanced positionality throughout this work. It will become obvious to a reader of this thesis that I love barbershop and Vocal FX, but I also engage with the deeper issues underpinning barbershop music in local and global contexts in a way that is not purely celebratory. Barbershop music and the organizations that guide it are not entirely a model for inclusivity or belonging yet, and I frequently question some of the decisions and constructed norms implicit in this style of singing throughout the thesis to critique some of the problems in the barbershop world.

Deborah Wong's chapter from *Shadows in the Field*, "Moving: From Performance to Performative Ethnography and Back Again", discusses how scholars can grapple with a performative ethnographic approach – one of the approaches I employ in this thesis. As a member of the chorus, I write from the perspective of someone that contributes to the ensemble, rather than that of a fly-on-the-wall. Furthermore, Wong calls for a focus on "creating performative ethnographies while acknowledging the place of auto-ethnography in our methodologies" (77). While I don't rely on the approach, auto-ethnography does inform certain parts of this thesis. I do not shy away from first-person accounts of events and performances, and detail how it felt from a personal perspective to be involved in certain profound moments during my research period or my time with the ensemble more generally. In terms of Wong's work, her discussion of writing for her audience resonates with my intended tone here. She writes the following in light of her experience as a taiko player, which became the case study for her chapter:

I don't talk with taiko players the way I'm going to write here, and I have struggled with what this might mean for the book I'm writing. I feel taiko players reading this as I write. The question is whether there are effective ways to speak to all such readers at once and still satisfy myself as both an ethnomusicologist and as a taiko player. (Wong 2008, 77)

Wong's conclusion to this thought is open-ended and inconclusive. She suggests that there may not be one concrete way to negotiate processes of academicizing and theorizing musical experience, while also speaking truthfully to the experience of the musicians involved. In my research, I have aimed to privilege the voices of members in the chorus, as well as continuing to use the language and experiences of barbershop in Vocal FX to guide my writing. Performative ethnography allows me to draw from my own experience, and to combine that with fieldwork, interviews and memory-based anecdotes to paint a picture of what is to be in Vocal FX at this time.

Combined with these ethnographic approaches are some historical musicological analysis, as well as occasional theory-based analyses of sheet music examples where appropriate. These analyses elucidate some of the musical and historical concepts that underpin all experiences of barbershop singing. The combination of each of the aforementioned methodologies contribute to a holistic understanding of my role as a researcher, and of what it is to conduct this work in a barbershop context.

Barbershop Scholarship

While barbershop music is all-encompassing to many of those in the bubble, it is still a relatively uncommon topic in academic circles, particularly in a contemporary sense. Gage Averill's book *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of Barbershop Harmony* (2003) is the seminal text when considering barbershop music and the community-based and social aspects of the style. Averill's text is closest in sentiment and subject material to the content in this thesis, and as such acts as a prominent resource throughout this work. Beyond Averill, Lynn Abbott's "'Play That Barber Shop Chord': A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony" (1992), and acclaimed barbershop singer Jim Henry's thesis, entitled "The Origins of Barbershop Harmony: A Study of Barbershop's Musical Link to Other African American Musics As Evidenced Through Recordings And Arrangements Of Early Black And White Quartets" (2000) are in-depth studies of barbershop music from a historical point of view that push back against arguments for the European origins of barbershop singing, instead advocating for a link between barbershop music and African-American singers in the 19th-century. Robert Stebbins' book *The Barbershop Singer: Inside the Social World of a*

Musical Hobby (1996) acts as a view into the world of the die-hard barbershopper, although it is slightly dated now given the time between the release of Stebbins' book and the present, while Liz Garnett's work (1999) has delved into views outside of North America (in the United Kingdom, namely) and outside of traditionally male-only scholarship (both in terms of the subject matter and the scholar themselves). Outside of formal academic literature, barbershop singers and judges like David Wright have offered countless seminars and video presentations delving into the history of barbershop music. Wright's "History of Barbershop" classes offered at Barbershop Harmony Society's Harmony University education week (held once yearly at Nashville's Belmont University) are a great resource for learning about the lineage from early barbershop (or musics tangential to barbershop) through to the present-day versions of barbershop music.

Beyond Garnett's work in the United Kingdom, there is a distinct lack of representation in barbershop scholarship outside of North America. One might suggest that this is reflective of the population and/or demographic of people who partake in barbershop music, but my position is that more voices must be heard – both in barbershop musicking settings, and in barbershop scholarship – so that a truer picture can be painted of a global barbershop scene. There are now barbershop associations emerging all across the world, from Australasian to Asian to European contexts, and this process of globalization will only further develop if "Everyone in Harmony" succeeds in the coming years. In light of these developments, barbershop scholarship can become a more diverse field as more voices from diverse contexts contribute to it. Furthermore, it is difficult to find much in the way of contemporary scholarship based in barbershop music, even as musicological and ethnomusicological accounts of choral music are still commonplace. As I discuss in my first chapter, barbershop has historically struggled with inclusivity, often precluding access to this style of singing based on questions of race or gender. My aim with this thesis is to contribute to diversifying the approach to barbershop scholarship, by adding my young voice – geographically removed from the American hub of barbershop music - to the mix of contributing scholars in the field.

Terminology

One of the ways in which my insider positionality is confirmed in this thesis is through the use of insider terminology. Barbershop music is filled with an array of unique jargon – some

theoretical, and some emanating from more social settings. To keep as close as I can to replicating the feeling of the context I research, and to stay true to the source material throughout this thesis, I have opted to use this terminology throughout. As such, to a non-barbershopper, much of this terminology might appear confusing or unknown in a lot of cases. It is prudent, then, to preface this work with a breakdown of some of the key jargon I utilise throughout this thesis. To do this, I draw from my own experiences and language that I have picked up from my five years as a barbershopper and lean on existing glossaries from Averill (2003) and Richardson & Markley (1975) to give definitions for terms. I hope that by combining glossaries from three distinct eras of barbershop that I can provide a holistic understanding of some of the insider terminology most commonly used by practitioners of this musical style. I include a glossary at the conclusion of the thesis but develop some of the most salient terms here.

An important distinction to make at this introductory stage is to discuss how I engage with barbershop's judging categories. Barbershop style is largely predicated and conceptualised by the way it is judged in contests. There is a uniform system across all Barbershop Harmony Society mandated events (the system differs in Sweet Adelines, Inc. for female singers), wherein singers are judged equally on Singing, Music, and Performance. I discuss these categories in more depth in my first chapter, but I note here that where these words are capitalised throughout the thesis, I am referring to the category of judging rather than the term as used in general musical discourse. Particularly for elite ensembles like Westminster Chorus or Vocal FX, these categories at least subconsciously inform pedagogical approaches to singing and influence conceptualisation of performance in this style, so they serve as a useful framework for defining the barbershop style.

A "barbershopper", then, is someone who can identify as an insider in barbershop settings. They sing themselves (although there is no requirement for ability, anyone can be a barbershopper as long as they can hold a part), and partake in singing in either a chorus, quartet, or in social settings. Barbershoppers often identify with one of four vocal parts:

- **Lead** is the melody singer, and often aligns with the vocal range of a second tenor.
- **Bass** is the lowest voice. They often sing root notes and 5th notes and play a pivotal role in "ringing" a chord – more on that shortly.

- **Tenor** harmonizes above the **Lead**, so they align with the vocal range of a first tenor, and often sing thirds and fifths above the melody.
- **Baritone** is the final voice part, and their job is generally to fill-in-the-gaps. This part is usually filled by versatile singers, as the counter-melodic singing that typifies a baritone part can be rangy and theoretically complicated, so as to facilitate the lead melody and the production of four-part (often dominant seventh) chords.

The language associated with these voice parts is inherently male-inclined (in that the voice parts are tethered to male voice ranges), but these are the established names for voice parts across all barbershop organizations – including for female and mixed ensembles. The male bias in barbershop language is unfortunate given the ever-growing female population of barbershoppers, not to mention mixed ensembles (and therefore singers from the LGBTQI+ community). I develop this idea in the first chapter of this thesis, where I discuss the politics of exclusion in barbershop history.

One of the most prevalent terms is “lock and ring”, or the idea of “ringing chords” – as I mentioned in my introductory anecdote. This is a common term in barbershop contexts and pertains directly to the generating of overtones from creating a perfectly tuned, well-matched and balanced chord from four voices. I build on this further in Chapter 1, where I delve into what barbershop music is from a theoretical perspective as part of an overview of barbershop more generally.

Finally, I include a short section directly relating to Vocal FX. While I introduce Vocal FX in more detail throughout the rest of the thesis, I think it is important to establish who the directors are in this terminology section, as I refer to them by first name throughout the thesis. Charlotte Murray, who was the first woman to be named a “Master Director” by Barbershop Harmony Society, and Musical Island Boys tenor singer Jeff Hunkin are the directors of the ensemble. Charlotte is the original director of the chorus, while Jeff became co-director in 2015. Additionally, Chapters 2 and 3 engage with Vocal FX’s non-contest and contest repertoire. In Chapter 2, I discuss the idea of the “cultural set” – a performance tailored specifically for Vocal FX’s appearance at the World Harmony Showcase (formerly World Harmony Jamboree) during the week of the Barbershop Harmony Society’s International Convention. The World Harmony Showcase is a concert where ensembles attending the Convention from outside North America are asked to perform something from

their own country's musical traditions. The "cultural set", Vocal FX's own informal name for the set of songs and dances performed by the chorus for this event, is an important term to discern as I would imagine the term to be unique to the experience of this ensemble, and not something that every ensemble (elite or otherwise) would use.

Conclusion

This thesis serves as a testament to the diverse and exciting possibilities that barbershop can offer across the world, while also serving as a critique of why the experience of barbershop in New Zealand is not the universal one. The diversity in membership and approach to barbershop repertoire at an elite level (particularly through integrating popular music and indigeneity into performance) places New Zealand's barbershop scene at the forefront of artistic and social progression in barbershop. These are uncommon traits in a global sense, and ensembles like Vocal FX stand out for their inclusivity and boldness as a result. Particularly in light of barbershop's troubled history and, even more so, in light of the new Everyone in Harmony inclusivity initiative, it is tough to fathom how some corners of the barbershop world can maintain their exclusive ways in light of the clear perks of the more diverse, inclusive approach to the style.

Chapter 1: “Keep the Whole World Singing”: Co-operation, camaraderie, and the politics of belonging

This chapter engages with two ideas central to the experience of barbershop music – camaraderie and belonging. These concepts are integral to barbershop music at all levels of singing, from the everyday singers throughout New Zealand who sing for enjoyment and to enjoy the company of others through to the best-of-the-best in the Association of International Champions (AIC) – the ensemble and organization consisting purely of International Quartet Champions, effectively a living canon in barbershop contexts. Barbershop is implicitly a “team sport” and can’t be mastered by any one individual singer (in a performative sense). As such, barbershoppers rely on the people around them to be able to achieve “lock and ring”, sell the message of a song, and contribute to the four-part harmony singing that defines this musical style. The feelings of fraternity in barbershop have been often discussed, and camaraderie seems to be prevalent in any discussion of this music. Belonging appears to be a more complicated proposition, however. As part of my research, I want to ask a simple question – who gets to sing barbershop? Barbershop has an undeniably exclusionary history, particularly when considering segregation on the basis of race or gender throughout barbershop’s history. That being said, reparations are in place now through the development of the “Everyone in Harmony” initiative currently being explored by Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS). This initiative seeks to diversify the society from a membership, engagement and competitive standpoint, as BHS finds new ways to encourage communities outside of the established barbershop community to engage with and sing barbershop music. As such, I want to reflect on why singers have been excluded or not enticed by barbershop singing over its 82-year formalised history.

This chapter begins with a short history of barbershop music, and of quartet singing in North America and New Zealand. This history includes a discussion of tradition and the “good old days” narrative at the heart of the barbershop experience. I then consider research into homosociality and discuss experiences of co-operation implicit in this style of singing. Finally, I look into some of the socio-political issues that have precluded various demographics from being able to contribute to the barbershop community.

What is barbershop music?

In considering the history of barbershop music, it becomes important to discuss the characteristics of barbershop music itself – especially in light of its relative obscurity in the public consciousness. Barbershop harmony comes with its own unique set of rules and conventions that set it apart from other styles of a cappella harmony singing. These rules and conventions contribute to a unique sound – a sound that seems to be addictive for its singers - and they act as a platform for their artistic expression. Gage Averill defines barbershop harmony as:

[...] four-part, a cappella, consonant, close-harmony singing with the voices typically in TTBB (tenor, lead, baritone and bass), and featuring a flexible tempo, a preponderance of dominant seventh-type chords, ringing harmonics, characteristic arranging devices (swipes, tags, etc) and a commitment to the popular songs of an earlier period in American history (1890-1930). (Averill 2003, 3)

Averill's *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of Barbershop Harmony* was published in 2003, and acts as the seminal academic text regarding the social history of barbershop music to this point. Given the relative recency of *Four Parts, No Waiting*, and the slow-moving nature of barbershop (politically and musically), many of the musical traits Averill describes and engages with remain the same today. Of particular note is the “preponderance of dominant seventh-type chords”, “arranging devices” and “ringing harmonics”, all of which play an integral role in the construction of the barbershop sound. The viewpoint employed by Averill here is limited to American contexts (a product of the research context he works in here, rather than of his approach) and focuses primarily on historicized accounts of barbershop – rather than forecasting or considering where the musical style could progress to, beyond American contexts. Averill's description of a “commitment to the popular songs of an earlier period in American history (1890-1930)” is accurate insofar as to say that shared repertoire and songs most appropriately arrangeable into the barbershop style often come from this era of popular music. This has changed somewhat in the 17 years since *Four Parts, No Waiting*, as groups such as Signature, The Newfangled Four and, perhaps tellingly, international groups such as Sweden's Ringmasters and New Zealand's Musical Island Boys push towards more contemporary material from the later 20th-century (including soul and R&B music), as well as 21st-century popular music in their contestable repertoire.

Historically speaking, barbershop music is largely characterized and defined by the musical tenets which underpin the arrangements sung by quartets and choruses all over the world. Burt Szabo's 1976 text *Theory of Barbershop Harmony* elucidates many of these key traits. Szabo, among other barbershop scholars and music theorists (Henry 2000; Wright 2016) suggests that the harmonies in barbershop music emanate from "harmonic practices of 19th-century European and American classical music" (Szabo 1976, 1), and utilise chords built by stacking thirds within four voices. As with many Western harmonic structures, barbershop harmony is built around the circle of fifths, and relies on secondary dominant movement through this circle to move through these harmonic progressions.

Given the four voices in barbershop music, seventh chords become prevalent – particularly the dominant 7th chord, which Szabo notes has been popularized within barbershop circles as "the barbershop 7th chord" (11). Building on Averill's aforementioned definition of barbershop harmony, this chord is common in barbershop arrangements, so much so that the category description for the Music category in the Barbershop Harmony Society Contest and Judging Handbook states that "[the barbershop seventh] and the major triad are the most featured chords in barbershop harmony" (Barbershop Harmony Society and Society Contest and Judging Committee 2018). This handbook states the key facets by which competitive barbershop is judged, and thereby dictates what is rewarded and ascribed canonical value within the Society. This handbook is updated yearly and serves as a mission statement for what the judging community (who also get to act as tastemakers, in reality) want to present as "barbershop".

A final tenet worth exploring is the propensity for barbershop arrangements to resolve to a major key at the conclusion of the song. In some cases, this results in use of a Picardy third (eg. in well-known songs such as "Love Me, and the World is Mine" and "This Heart of Mine"), in which a suspension or "tiddly" of some sort precedes a part resolving to the major third of the tonic chord. Given the oft-referred to quality of major tones as sounding positive and/or happy, this contributes to a sense of closure and enjoyment at the end of a barbershop arrangement – for singers and listeners alike.

The "listeners" in a barbershop setting could include judges – often experts within a certain field of musical performance (barbershop specific, or more generally throughout other fields of vocal pedagogy and performance). Judges shape the way barbershoppers engage with

certain facets of barbershop music by choosing what to reward in competition – something which has a trickle-down effect onto other singers in the art form, as if to create trends within the style. Barbershop is judged on three categories: Music, Singing, and Performance. Each category carries equal weight, although Singing is unofficially the most important category by virtue of historically being the tiebreaker category for quartets and/or choruses with tied scores in a competition. Singing judges evaluate “the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style”; the Performance judges evaluate “how effectively a performer brings the song to life; that is, the believability of the theme in its musical and visual setting”, and; the Music judges evaluate “the song and arrangement, as performed” (definitions as per the Barbershop Harmony Society Contest and Judging Handbook, August 2018). Of course, there is more nuance to each of these categories beyond these simple definitions – the Singing category is primarily interested in precise intonation, vocal skill and unity within the ensemble, and the Performance judge responds to how the vocal and visual aspects of a performance work together to “create the image of the song”.

Part of the Music category definition is to reward groups based on “the sensitive handling of musical elements, such as melody, harmony , and embellishments” in judging the “song and arrangement, as performed” (Barbershop Harmony Society and Society Contest and Judging Committee 2018). These embellishments could include “swipes, echoes, key changes, bell chords, patter effects and backtime” (5-8, MUS Category in Contest and Judging Handbook). Swipes and echoes, in particular, are characteristic traits one would expect to hear in a barbershop arrangement of any kind. The Music category also rewards “lock and ring” – the “hallmark of the barbershop style” – which is predicated on “the inherent consonance potential of chords chosen by the arranger, a primarily homorhythmic texture, and performance elements associated with the consonance and execution aspects of the [Music] category...” (5-3, MUS Category, Contest and Judging Handbook).

These musical tenets underpin all barbershop singing, be that at an amateur or elite level in both quartet and chorus contexts. While there has been significant progression in recent times as far as repertoire and source material is concerned, the “barbershop 7th”, embellishments and judging categorizations inherently guide this style of singing and separate it from other a cappella vocal traditions.

History of Organized Barbershop

To give wider context as to how and where barbershop singing takes place (both socially and in formalised competitive contexts), it is prudent to consider the role of formalised societies in barbershop. The powerhouse of barbershop is the United States-based Barbershop Harmony Society, whilst affiliate organisations (such as in New Zealand) and districts/regions in North America (such as Ontario and the “Sunshine District” (California)) have their own societies on a micro level. Each of these societies facilitate competitions, educational opportunities, and membership for barbershop singers all over the world. Internationally, affiliates look to the United States to influence their own take on barbershop.

The Barbershop Harmony Society as we know it today formed in 1938 as the “Society for the Preservation and Propagation of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in the United States”, before being altered to the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA). The name, and organization, were founded by O.C. Cash and Rupert Hall after a chance encounter in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at which time they began reminiscing about “the old songs” and singing in barbershop contexts (Averill 2003, 98-99). I discuss these “old songs” later in this chapter, as well as the relationship between barbershop and nostalgia – implicit from the conception of the formalised Society for singing in this style.

The Barbershop Harmony Society, likely due in part to its role as the host of the International Competitions every year, still acts as the pre-eminent force in barbershop music globally. While they have endeavoured to branch out and globalise the style, this implicitly reinforces a United States-based bias and/or predisposition to barbershop music. Despite this, barbershop has managed to branch out and form affiliate organisations in Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Australia, Spain, and New Zealand (amongst others), while there are known practising barbershop ensembles from Japan and India. These organisations still work within the confines of American barbershop, in that they are judged in the same categories (usually by judges from the BHS guild, so largely American), and quartets and choruses have to travel to the US to compete in their International Competition to gain any genuine success and/or notoriety within barbershop circles.

Harmony Singing, the “Quartet”, and New Zealand

Harmony singing holds a special place in New Zealand culture, particularly for many indigenous people who have historically made their way here over a long period of time. Part of this influence undoubtedly emanates from the colonial era, and the influence of missionaries and English folksong on the musical traditions of Māori and Pacific Island cultures throughout New Zealand and the wider Pacific. Over the course of the 20th-century, this influence was developed and recontextualised by entertainers from these cultures which paved the way for, among other musical and artistic progressions, the development of New Zealand’s popular music tradition. Vocal FX’s “cultural set” for the World Harmony Showcase is an example of this, whereby music from Māori and Pacific Island cultures is recontextualised and celebrated in barbershop contexts – often removed from the traditional use or performative contexts of these songs.

As barbershop music revolves around the idea of four voices – often in the form of a quartet – one could easily draw correlations, in a local context, to the histories of quartet singing in popular music in New Zealand. In particular, one group stands out – the Howard Morrison Quartet, featuring singers Gerry Merito, Wi Wharekura, Noel Kingi, and the lead singer Howard Morrison. A historical video of this quartet (Howard Morrison Quartet, 2012) performing shows many similarities to the barbershop tradition (especially in its earlier forms) – four men crowded around a condenser microphone, singing the popular songs of the day in four-part harmony with dominant seventh chords integral to the voice leading and chordal progressions. TVNZ’s recent documentary series *Funny As: The Story of New Zealand Comedy* (dir. Rupert Mackenzie, 2019) features an episode on musical comedy, and another episode on the influence of Māori and Pacific Island entertainers on the wider New Zealand comedy landscape. Groups such as the Howard Morrison Quartet are profiled in this series alongside groups like the Māori Volcanics (who included legendary New Zealand comic Billy T James in their ensemble) and the contemporary group the Modern Māori Quartet. One comedian in the documentary notes that the Howard Morrison Quartet were “four guys in suits looking suave as hell, and they open their voiceboxes and Howard’s just charming the pants off everybody”. A member of the Modern Māori Quartet commended this ensemble for doing “a really beautiful political thing” and for being “really positive... [they show] Māori in a positive light”. Beyond the local context, Morrison notes the influence of harmony singing and groups

like The Mills Brothers on the sound of the quartet - not too dissimilar to the American quartets.

Barbershop in New Zealand

The output of the Howard Morrison Quartet was never quantified as barbershop singing, however, despite the similarities and shared influences (like The Mills Brothers). In a New Zealand context, barbershop is still a reasonably new genre of music – at least in a formal capacity. Barbershop Harmony New Zealand (formerly New Zealand Association of Barbershop Singers) was formed in the early 1980s (as per the Barbershop Harmony New Zealand website) and has experienced great success at an international level, especially for a country as small in population (let alone practising choral musicians) as New Zealand is. There has been one gold medal quartet (Musical Island Boys, in 2014), one high-placing chorus (Vocal FX, placing as high as 6th in 2016) alongside other internationally competing choruses (Canterbury Plainsmen and City of Sails in past years) and a handful of quartets in the Collegiate/Youth Quartet competition (including medallists The Mission, also in 2016). New Zealand is especially competitive in an international context, given the geographical distance between it and the home of barbershop music, and despite the small number of singers that engage with barbershop in this country. Whilst barbershop music is taught extensively throughout high schools in New Zealand (culminating with the Young Singers in Harmony National competitions, held yearly since 1992 for boys and 1996 for girls), there is a steep drop-off in membership and engagement with the style post-secondary school. Wellington acts as a hub for the style, with the largest demographic of high school singers in the style, as well as young choruses such as Vocal FX and Embellished (a young women's chorus). New Zealand has held its own National Convention since 1989, and every "3 or 4 years" (Barbershop Harmony New Zealand, n.d.) contributes to the Pan-Pacific Barbershop Convention held in conjunction with Australia, Hawaii and, occasionally, Japan. The expansion of barbershop outside of Anglo-American contexts is still a work in progress, but the style seems to be on the incline globally as singers are exposed to the style, and to opportunities to sing and make friends therein. As far as membership is concerned, the 2019 BHNZ Annual General Meeting documents suggest that there is a gradual increase in members in progress currently. I would forecast that number to greatly rise if the results of the Everyone in Harmony diversification process make their way to New Zealand, as that

would allow all sorts of ensembles to begin singing barbershop (competitively and otherwise) – particularly as barbershop will be more open to female and mixed-gender ensembles in New Zealand from this point on.

Homosociality and Co-operation

Implicit in the experience of barbershop music for any singer are teamwork and camaraderie. Given barbershop's reliance on each of four voice types to fulfil a role in musical, vocal and performative senses, it is important to consider frameworks for theorizing this experience. This is amplified when considering the social facets of barbershop singing too, whereby due to the inherent need for singers in chorus contexts, singers work together to fulfil these voice roles in groups rather than as individuals. This brings me to ideas of collaboration and homosociality, as per Faulkner and Davidson's article "Men in chorus: collaboration and competition in homo-social vocal behaviour" (2006) and Faulkner's book *Icelandic Men and Me: Sagas of Singing, Self and Everyday Life* (2013).

In Faulkner and Davidson's article, a framework for analysing and/or categorising men's vocal experience is proposed, and features three parameters: "competition and collaboration; formal and informal settings; [and] learning, rehearsing, and performing..." (Faulkner and Davidson 2006, 224). These three parameters are true too of analysing barbershop music. Faulkner and Davidson rightly quote Stebbins' work in barbershop in the initial stages of their article, in which "the most 'important thrill' in pursuing choral singing as a leisure activity is the competing or winning as a chorus in regional, [district], area or national [contest]" (220). This is an accurate claim for many singers in the barbershop style – singing in a chorus is likely the most common mode of interaction with barbershop singing, as the very nature of a chorus allows for many more singers to contribute than a quartet or solo environment. The International Competition, particularly, allows hundreds of singers (many of whom are non-professional singers from all walks of life) to sing in large venues and compete to be an international champion in their field, be that in quartet or chorus (or even both). High-level competition in a macro sense is not the only driver for barbershop singers, and Faulkner and Davidson acknowledge this by considering links between singers in chorus contexts. Their discussions of inter-voice competition and collaboration extend perfectly to barbershop. Often, in social tag-singing environments, singers will attempt to show they can sing a post

higher or lower than another person (so as to showcase vocal superiority). I have experienced this in barbershop singing – both in New Zealand and abroad. At National Conventions here, I can recall “post” competitions (where singers are challenged to hold a note longer than anyone else), as well as competitions around range (i.e. highest and lowest note achieved by a singer at the convention – both formally and informally). In my travels to events in the United States, I have felt as if singing tags is a way of proving that I belong in these settings – if I can show good singers that I can sing, I might feel as if I’m not out of place having travelled halfway across the world to compete or learn. Also common is the quartet sing-off, whereby a group of four singers will sing a tag, and then a separate group of four singers will sing the tag a semi-tone higher, and so on until the singing reaches a remarkable or humorously unremarkable point. In formal rehearsal contexts, voice parts will often rehearse as individual units (i.e. a small rehearsal for lead singers within a larger ensemble rehearsal time), or duet with another part (i.e. often Lead and Bass singers singing their parts together, without the Tenor and Baritone). These scenarios allow singers to develop ensemble awareness in a myriad of ways – firstly, singers become used to the voices in their section, and figure out where they fit, and; secondly, singers begin to understand the role of their voice part within the wider context of the ensemble through analysing their relationships with other voice parts. These processes contribute to an understanding of homo-vocal behaviour and the process of singing in harmony with other singers. Faulkner and Davidson write:

Singing in harmony appears to provide opportunities for differentiation between individuals; it recognizes difference and individual value, but constrains excessive displays of individuality through interdependent behaviour in pursuit of a single collective and homogenous voice. (Faulkner and Davidson 2006, 231)

One of my interview subjects discussed this very idea:

You can always find your place, there’s always a place for you in some form. Everyone feels like they have a place, or plays a role, and that their role is important and they feel significant. Because, with a singing style like barbershop, everyone is significant and everyone does play a role. It is teamwork, and everyone has to take responsibility for their role as well. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 9/9/19)

This teamwork and camaraderie discussion acts as one of three motivations for singers to sing barbershop (as per the Barbershop Harmony Society’s Director’s Manual). The other two are the competitive aspect of singing in this style, and the feeling of being enveloped in lush,

homophonic textures. To me, this last category also encapsulates the opportunities implicit in barbershop singing for personal growth and development as a singer, musician, and educator. While this was originally going to be a large part of this research, the social elements of the ethnographic process have revealed more pressing conversations. That being said, studies exist (both within barbershop circles and in music theory scholarship more broadly) that consider the role of various intervals and chords in the visceral experience of singers (Huron 2006, Richards 2001).

I asked many of my interviewees from Vocal FX as to what their individual motivations were for being a barbershop singer. I discussed the above content from the Director's Manual, and asked if they identified with any one (or none) of the three categories listed therein. I found that, as I would myself, singers I spoke to were often sceptical of strict categorization here, and rather used the aforementioned motivations as a platform for considering their personal engagement with Vocal FX and singing barbershop.

An example of such a response to that question, from a discussion I had with a Vocal FX singer, is this:

Probably a combination of all three. I think, certainly the people, certainly the people. You know, the new people that join the chorus – you love their enthusiasm, energy, and some of the experiences they have ... It kind of reminds you that this is why we do it. Some of the people who are just experiencing the first year or two, or just going to their first convention or whatever, and them experiencing what you experienced. For the guys who have poured blood, sweat and tears into this chorus for nigh on 15 years, there's just an unspoken brotherhood there. That's a brother for life right there, and it's from someone who, in another life, you might not even cross paths with that person, and they're a brother for life. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 19/7/19)

This speaks to ideas of homosociality, given the development of strong friendships and bonds with fellow men within a homo-vocal space. The networks made between singers in Vocal FX extend beyond musicking, and into genuine friendships in everyday life. Another member of the chorus responding to my prompt identified strongly with ideas of personal development relative to their study of music:

I'm not actually sure that my reason fits into those three. Maybe it fits broadly into the second one... the reason I will do any musical thing is because I believe it will improve my skills as a musician, and it's going to be a vehicle to learn new techniques,

attitudes, and musical discourses that I can then transfer to my own music... singing in the a cappella style and learning the harmony of barbershop, and the way it pertains to the human voice and, by extension, the rest of Western Art music, is the reason I keep coming back. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 19/7/19)

Other singers commented on the social qualities of singing barbershop, and how safety and belonging were the key facets of the experience:

Competitiveness and the inherent qualities of the music, like, of course those are really big reasons why I stay with this particular ensemble. But those aren't reasons that jump into my head immediately... the feeling of connection to community, it does feel tempting to say that. I would like to modify that in a very slight way to be about how singing barbershop with Vocal FX gives me an opportunity to become more comfortable with being myself. With who I am, my cultural identity, my musical identity, my masculine gendered identity, I'm developed in all of these areas every Monday night, every time we get together to sing. And that happens in a space that makes me feel safe, gives me trust. As a base level, the fact that I feel safe in this community is probably the biggest reason why I stay. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 15/8/19)

These responses display a huge spread of responses to considering the three motivations for singing barbershop. These responses are reasonably tethered to ideas of camaraderie or musical development but display a personalised connection with barbershop that exceeds the simplicity of the stark categorizations I mentioned earlier. Especially in the case of the last quote, it often comes down to being part of a community, learning about oneself while learning singing, and contributing to an ensemble in a safe environment.

Barbershop singing, then, like any chorus based vocal activity, allows opportunities to privilege the voice of an individual, whilst also allowing these singers an opportunity to work towards achieving a symbiosis with other singers in their voice part and the ensemble in a wider sense. This is true of formal environments, but also true of informal social singing contexts. Whilst musical and physiological concepts underpin these singing interactions, the singers are simultaneously working through modes of collaboration and understanding – both of their own voices and of the voices of those around them – as they seek to execute and achieve good singing and ringing chords.

Exclusion

Barbershop's history, however, paints a picture that suggests it has not (and perhaps is still not) as simple as four people standing around and working together to sing and ring chords. One of the main aims of this research is to question, both historically and in a contemporary context, who gets to sing barbershop? What precludes various demographics from taking part in this musical style? In this section, I consider why and how certain demographics are or aren't included in barbershop singing. In particular, I focus on exclusionary politics emanating from barbershop's treatment of race and gender. I acknowledge the "Everyone in Harmony" policy's intent, but I also think any discussion of progression in barbershop has to consider what has happened in this context historically, and some of the issues that still hang over this style of singing. Much of my discussion is based in the existing accounts of barbershop represented in academic literature, alongside experiential writing from my time as a barbershop singer. One flaw in this approach is that I make assumptions and, potentially, criticise particular demographics that are pervasive in barbershop experience. I do this not to exclude or dissuade these singers from being barbershoppers. Rather, I engage in this critical conversation because I feel, as a scholar, singer and as a young adult, that it is necessary for barbershoppers to consider the inherent flaws that have been pervasive in barbershop's lineage. My aim in this section to point out certain facets of barbershop scholarship and organization that have become incongruent with present-day reality in this musical style.

Race

A logical starting point for this critical conversation is race – particularly relative to exclusionary politics and segregation. While many of barbershop's leading scholars (Abbott, Henry, Averill, Wright) argue for the African American origins of barbershop singing, the formalisation of SPEBSQSA in 1938 resulted in the style being taken away from that demographic. Infamously, the Grand Central Red Caps – a popular quartet of the early era – were denied the opportunity to compete in a competition in St. Louis, MO in 1941 (Barbershop Harmony Society 2018). In response to hearing that a black quartet would be representing New York at the national convention, O.C. Cash (the founder and, at this point in barbershop history, leader of organized barbershop singing) wrote a letter that included the following extract:

The question of allowing colored singers to compete with others in the contests has been discussed a number of times at our meetings, and last year the board came to the conclusion that to keep down any embarrassment we ought not to permit colored people to participate. I hope this rule will not seriously embarrass you [the New York committee], as any other sort of arrangement would seriously embarrass us. Many of our members and chapters are in the South, where the race question is rather a touchy subject... (Cash 1941, quoted in Averill 2003, 110)

Cash seems to be addressing logistical issues arising from racial politics between the North and the South in the United States during this period, given that this letter was written during the period of Jim Crow segregationist law (and prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964). While there is structural or legal basis behind this letter, the language and sentiment of Cash's letter set a prejudicial tone over the recently formalised SPEBSQSA – a tone that would linger for decades to come. African Americans (and really any non-white men) were excluded from barbershop competitions until 1963, at which time the Ontario district threatened to pull out of competing if the exclusionary politics continued, as per Wright's account (2016), and not because the Society recognised its own prejudice (it didn't).

Exclusionary racial politics would haunt quartet singing in New Zealand too, during a similar era. New Zealand's quartet singing scene acts as a foil to this conversation of racist lyrical content in Anglo-American barbershop, particularly when considering the Howard Morrison Quartet's 1960 recording of "My Old Man's an All Black". The song was a parody of Lonnie Donegan's "My Old Man's a Dustman" and employed satire as a tool to critique the political situation in apartheid-era South Africa, where the All Blacks were due to tour (also in 1960). NZHistory's website notes that "sporting ties with South Africa during the apartheid years became a source of great debate and division in New Zealand society... protest against playing South African teams began as early as 1960, when the All Blacks bowed to the race laws of the republic and selected a touring team with no Māori players." "My Old Man's an All Black" serves to directly criticise this regime, and features lyrics such as:

Oh, my old man's an All Black,
He wears the silver fern,
But his mates just couldn't take him
So he's out now for a turn.
(Fi Fi Fo Fum, there's no Horis in this scrum.) (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2014)

While musical comedy drove a lot of the success of the Howard Morrison Quartet, a line such as “fee fi fo fum, there’s no Horis in this scrum” points towards some serious social commentary around the apartheid movement, and how other parties outside of South Africa were to engage with them – culturally, in sport, or in general discourse. It is fascinating to consider that, at this point, a vocal group of Māori singers from New Zealand were questioning political norms, while in Anglo-American barbershop contexts, troubling racial language was still widely being used in barbershop lyrics. Even today, the influence of minstrelsy and vaudevillian entertainment still somewhat lingers over the barbershop lexicon – as recently as September 2019, I heard a quartet sing “Where the Southern Roses Grow” at the BHNZ National Convention – a song which refrain reads “Where the Swanee River’s twining, I can see the home lights shining...” Prestige sang “Swanee” in their winning competition set in the International Collegiate (Under-25) Contest (now known as the Next Generation Quartet Contest) in 2011 – a song which makes regular reference to “mammy” and “Dixie”, some 70 years after the initial exclusion of the Grand Central Red Caps. While the Everyone in Harmony initiative sought to rectify matters of racial exclusion (through the Grand Central Red Caps endowment and retrospective awarding of life membership to the four members of that ensemble, in particular), it is clear that the vernacular of anti-Black America persists in barbershop lyrics and performance. I suspect this goes unnoticed by a large percentage of the barbershop demographic in the United States, as the focus is moreso on preserving songs that people love to sing, rather than on engaging with the connotations of the lyrics, although I suggest this discussion is probably a separate research project entirely.

A counter-narrative to the Anglo-American experience is to consider the demographics and repertoire represented in the most successful competitive barbershop ensembles to come from New Zealand. Musical Island Boys, in 2014, became the first quartet including men of colour to win the International Quartet Contest (all four members are of Pacific Island descent). That win came some 51 years after SPEBSQSA removed segregation from the society, which in and of itself proves the lingering influence of Cash’s prejudicial decision in 1941. Furthermore, it strikes me that it took a further two years for an African-American man (Brian O’Dell of Forefront in 2016) to win a gold-medal in the contest, and a further three

years (Daniel Cochran of Signature in 2019) for another African-American man to join him in the AIC. Furthermore, Vocal FX feature a strong Pacific Island and Māori presence – both in membership and in repertoire selection.

Gender

The other prevalent mode of exclusion in barbershop's history is gender. Prior to the recent Everyone in Harmony initiative, there has been a disconnect between male and female singers in barbershop music (not to mention very little engagement with singers who identify as non-binary or gender fluid). The disconnect is most exemplified through the split between three major organisations – BHS, Sweet Adelines Incorporated (SAI), and Harmony, Incorporated (Harmony Inc.) With BHS serving as the male organization, Sweet Adelines formed in 1945 (Nash & Nash 2016, 49). Nash & Nash's article "Feminizing a Musical Form: Women's Participation as Barbershop Singers" (2016) knowingly (and unknowingly) highlights many of the issues that emanate from the gender split, harking back to the very formation of SAI. They quote O.C. Cash as writing the following (noting Cash's "satirical style" and "his disdain for certain trends of modernity"):

It's the wimmin again! For some time we have heard rumblings of a proposed women's auxiliary to our society. In Detroit this June, I am told, misguided women of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, probably others, ribbed up the Oklahoma girls to start the movement in Tulsa and I'm damned if they ain't done it... Now we have had so much fun during the last seven years and our Society has been such a joyous, happy one that it is a shame this had to come up just when we getting along so peacefully. I am bewildered, confused and all messed up, besides being upset. Hoping you are the same, I am [signed] O.C. Cash. (Nash & Nash 2016, 49)

While there is an undeniable sarcasm to Cash's letter, there too exists an undeniable sexist undertone in this discourse. Nash & Nash's article itself produces some head-scratching comments around women's performance of barbershop song, going so far as to state that "of course, women sing the barbershop chord. In doing so, they reproduce a feminine form" (48). Beyond employing the same voice-names, arrangement style and organizational structure, I don't believe there to be anything distinctly masculine about the physical singing and/or music that emanates from the barbershop style. Rather, the distinctly gendered discourse and attitudes to cultivating a barbershop society for men first, and women second, leads to certain stereotypes and power structures being established within the art form. Liz Garnett

works through this divide through the “separate but equal” model, which “displays both the potential for female autonomy and the dangers of woman’s marginalization...” (Garnett 1999b, 1). Nash & Nash, through establishing their perspective through the perspective of women feminizing a masculine musical form, also point to some problematic discussions of sensitivity and feminization in male performance in the style. I fundamentally disagree with the features of the form that are “gendered as masculine”, such as “constrained or staged emotional displays”, and “social relationships that emerge within the singing community that are typically male, that is, instrumental, characterized by bantering and joking” (48). This points to an outdated mode of thinking and communicating difference in a societal sense. The Performance category is moving in the direction of allowing singers (regardless of gender) to project genuine, authentic human emotion in their performance – sometimes that is framed through a character, but the ultimate goal is to project one’s own feelings onto a piece of music. I develop this thread in my final chapter, where I discuss the intersection of barbershop music (and, indeed, all vocal performance) and emotional expression (and, ultimately, men’s mental health). The sexist undertone of the second observation listed above further suggests the masculine, fraternized nature of barbershop music. While I have certainly seen elements of this in my time, I feel like there is an intimidating and exclusionary tone projected towards women (or non-binary singers) through implying the overwhelming viewpoint is one predicated on masculine “banter”.

Jeffrey Nash further clowns the idea of non-traditional masculinity when writing about his experience researching choruses in Philadelphia, in his article “Ringing the Chord: Sentimentality and Nostalgia among Male Singers” (2012). Part of this hinges on the idea of “banter” at rehearsals between chorus singers. Nash writes that “the music itself has a predominant bass (manly) sound, and men who sing the high tenor parts are often kidded about using their “girlie” voices (a reference to singing in falsetto)” (588). I haven’t encountered this sort of “banter” in Vocal FX, nor have I encountered the homophobic or sexist comments that follow:

[...] touching might be accompanied by remarks that distance the touching from a “gay” gesture: “Careful there young man,” or ‘Don’t get too used to this’ [...] While visitors are always welcome at rehearsals, whenever women (wives, daughters, granddaughters, or friends) are present, behaviour changes, almost as if one were in a men’s locker room and someone yells, “woman in the house!” (Nash 2012, 594)

It is puzzling to me that such sexist comments exist at the time of Nash's writing, close to 70 years after the formation of Sweet Adelines Incorporated. Furthermore, the "gay" gestures Nash writes about here just serve to reinforce that traditional masculine (or socially conservative) norms still exist in the mind-set of singers in some contexts, even as other ensembles and organizations move towards diversification and inclusivity. This account points to fears within these men as to being perceived as "gay" or having departed from modes of traditional masculinity.

Women have been involved in BHS' operations – albeit moreso in contemporary times. Vocal FX's director, Charlotte Murray, was recently certified as an official Performance judge within BHS, among the first group of women to achieve this. This follows a long period of time where occasionally women would be seen in contests as directors (who couldn't sing while directing), and in virtually no other major role within the organisation. This culture shift also emanates from the Everyone in Harmony initiative, which prominently features steps and processes towards what seems to be the Society's ultimate goal – gender neutrality across all forms of barbershop contest and performance contexts. The most recent development regards contest structure and the awarding of medals in competition. It has already been established that from 2021, BHS will cater for men's, women's, and mixed gender ensembles in their competition structure. As such, three options have been posed for structuring the competition in future years, which are:

- Option 1: Three classifications, five medallists each (i.e. split competition)
- Option 2: One overall champion, five medallists (i.e. fully integrated competition)
- Option 3: One overall champion, five medallists PLUS three awards per classification (i.e. an in-between option, presenting an overall champion while maintaining distinct competitions within each gender classification)

While each of these three options presents a forward-step in terms of inclusivity and gender neutrality in barbershop, it is evident that they represent varying degrees of progressiveness and/or willingness to accept change. Option 1 still features a divide between gendered ensembles, and while Option 3 offers an overall champion, it still gives most awards based on gender – rather than on quality of ensemble performance. In December 2019, after taking submissions from members of the Barbershop Harmony Society, BHS has opted to go for Option 1, which will be implemented at the 2021 International Convention in Cleveland

(Barbershop Harmony Society 2019). The Society Board “believes this decision represents the best path forward at this moment in our evolution”, but points out that this decision (and other structural changes in contests and qualifying) “does not prevent further expansion in the future... we fully expect our current structures and practices to change and grow”. I’m critical of this decision, as Option 1 is the most socially conservative (or is the safest) option of the three. If anything, I would consider that option to still be somewhat exclusive and divisive rather than the intention to diversify barbershop and make the contests more inclusive for all genders. While the Society Board acknowledges there is room for change in the future, I think that, at this stage, this re-structure only re-affirms some of the politics of exclusion which barbershop is trying to distance itself from.

While the influence of this initiative on barbershop in New Zealand remains to be seen, BHNZ recently voted at their 2019 AGM to open up membership and competitions to women’s and mixed ensembles, in a similar model to Option 1. This is a step forward for the New Zealand organization, but it is fascinating that it takes a big step from the American home of barbershop to catalyse this action here. Equally fascinating are the results from the BHNZ National Convention in 2019, held in Christchurch. There were Men’s and Mixed Quartet contests, and a Men’s chorus contest. The quartet contest posed an intriguing scenario, where the Mixed Quartet champion (who sing only one contest set rather than the two sets sung by Men’s quartets) scored higher than the Men’s champion, and thereby in a fair contest structure would have been the champions of the contest. Instead, the winner of the Men’s contest is regarded as the overall winner, with many spectators and singers using the term “Open Quartet Champions” to describe them – evidently untrue in this scenario.

The “Good Old Days” narrative – Nostalgia in barbershop

Part of this research establishes what is considered to be a “norm” in barbershop circles, as far as who “Joe Barbershopper” (an average member of BHS (Richardson and Markley 1975)) is and what demographic/s they represent or belong to in wider society. As evidenced in my discussion of exclusionary politics, barbershop’s history is underpinned by a desire to preserve something – a moment in time, a particular sound, and a particular feeling of belonging. Part of this emanates from barbershop’s ideologies around allowing singers to relive the “good old days”, as written about by Averill (2003). For some singers, this means

singing songs they grew up with, or singing songs that reminds them of their parents, or just enjoying music of the Tin Pan Alley era. An argument exists that nostalgia for the “good old days” could be a political term in the context of Jim Crow laws, whereby (white) people yearn for a time where things were easier and less complicated in a societal sense. This argument perpetuates marginalization of black people in American contexts and aligns with the slow rate of social change in barbershop’s history - serving as a possible explanation for why it took 80 years to create a focused inclusivity initiative.

Given barbershop’s propensity to catalyse and cultivate feelings of mass nostalgia, age becomes a defining feature of the “Joe Barbershopper” demographic. Various barbershop scholars (Averill, Nash, Wright) have written or spoken about the barbershopper’s love of “the old songs”. As I mentioned earlier, one of barbershop’s explicit aims is to preserve the music of a particular time-period – being the late 19th-century into the 20th-century. This is somewhat of a trope in barbershop in a contemporary sense, as a quartet like Main Street (the 2017 International Quartet Champions) would often parody or replicate performance in this style. Their costuming was similar to that of the Fallon example I shared in the introduction to the thesis, while they would incorporate tap dancing and humour into their performance. Contrastingly, their repertoire would often recontextualise the “old songs” narrative, especially when considering their “Pop Songs Medley” (2015). This performance included an introduction about loving the songs from the “good old days” but acknowledged the dated nature of that material. Instead, the arrangement included an array of songs that “will be the good old songs twenty years from now” – including PSY’s “Gangnam Style”, Lady Gaga’s “Poker Face”, and parodied modern slang (“that chord was so dope... it’s like barbershizzle”). While the medley is comedic in nature, it poses some questions around the “Good Old Days” narrative, and how barbershop is attempting to preserve a certain sound and a certain type of singing. If the repertoire moves forward into contemporary contexts, is something lost in barbershop contexts?

While the commitment to songs of a certain era has loosened somewhat in the past ten years, as barbershop seeks to slowly modernise itself and entice younger members, the “old songs” are still pervasive in the barbershop experience – particularly through shared repertoire known as “polecats”. The polecats represent a series of songs known by every barbershopper. In American contexts, barbershoppers are given a book of polecats upon joining the

Barbershop Harmony Society as a paid member, and are expected to learn these songs to sing with others at events, and/or in competition (given that these “old songs” best display the traditional barbershop sound). I have heard from various sources over my time as a barbershop singer that the songs in the Barberpole Cat Book were voted on by singers in the society, and so the polecats are deemed to be the most popular barbershop songs of a particular era. They embody the traditional barbershop sound, and allow for “lock and ring”, so they have endured through to present day.

Averill refers to these songs as “the old songs” because of the sonic palette and historical context from which they emanate, and the nostalgia associated with singing them. Whilst the original source of nostalgia is probably more irrelevant for barbershoppers today, given the age of the formalised Society and the distribution and popularization of polecat singing, there is still a propensity for singers to enjoy these simpler arrangements more than contemporary arrangements. A prime example of a polecat is “The Story of the Rose (Heart of My Heart)” – a song which I have heard or have sung at almost every barbershop convention or event that I have attended. A glance at the Barbershop Harmony Society published arrangement of this song (Figure 1) places this song within the wheelhouse of the “old songs”, given the publishing date of 1899 and the original purpose of this song as a love song in a play (“Last of the Rohans”). The text carries a simple, universally applicable message of expressing love towards someone – a common trope of barbershop lyrics.

This song features prominent four-part homophony throughout, as well as a harmonic progression that cycles through the circle of fifths in a simple form. The most intriguing part of the arrangement, harmonically speaking, comes in the climax of the song (“Say you’ll be mine for ever” features a diminished chord), which immediately resolves back to comfortable, conventional harmonic territory heading into the tag. As far as embellishments are concerned, there are frequent swipes (“with-out you” in bar 7, and throughout the tag (“I love you”). This arrangement is likely popular due to the ease with which each voice should be able to sing it – there is no stretch in the conventional tessitura for each part, and the phrases are generally quite short which allows for easy breath management. The song is short, and easy to learn given the similar nature of the first two verses. Either aurally learned or learned through the polecat book given to each member of BHS upon joining the society as a financial

member, this song is simple and classic barbershop and showcases many characteristic traits of the style.

THE STORY OF THE ROSE
(HEART OF MY HEART)

1899

Words by "ALICE" Music by ANDREW MACK (1863-1931)
Arr. SPEBSQSA, Inc.

CHORUS:

TENOR LEAD

BARITONE BASS

Heart of my heart, I love you, Life would be naught with - out _____ you.

Light of my life, my dar - ling, I love you, I love you. I can for -

get you nev - er, From you I ne'er can sev - er. Say you'll be

mine for - ev - er, I _____ love _____ you. _____

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© 1973 SPEBSQSA, Inc.

Figure 1: "The Story of the Rose (Heart of My Heart)", arranger unknown, SPEBSQSA/Barbershop Harmony Society, 1899

Nostalgia and the nature of how the polecats came into existence (and how they have endured) points to a heavy influence of an older demographic in barbershop music. It is

important too to note that, as per my introductory anecdote, contest is not the only way to sing barbershop. In fact, in a recent Everyone in Harmony proposal video, Board of Directors member (and gold-medal quartet singer) John Miller noted how few singers compete in their district every year, and how even fewer get to compete in an international contest – and that’s before accounting for gender. Rather, many singers see barbershop as a way to reminisce and re-connect with memories of a bygone era, with friends who share the same experiences through song. In my experience, the majority of barbershoppers fall into the 50+ year-old heterosexual white male category, with many exceeding that age. In addition, many singers from the older demographics represented in barbershop (both in New Zealand and in the American context) grew up singing the polecats (“the old songs”), and continue to sing them out of nostalgia for their youth, happier times and so on. This sort of demographic is depicted engaging in this in the documentary *American Harmony* (2009). Whilst the primary objective of this film is to depict the upper echelon of the International Quartet Competition (particularly through following International Quartet Champions Max Q), there are scenes in the middle of the film in which polecat singing is displayed and celebrated. In one such scene, a mass-sing of polecat “Wait till the Sun Shines, Nellie” takes place in the foyer of the auditorium hosting the convention. The camera regularly pans to older men, singing gleefully along with every word of the song. The wholesomeness of the massed sing represents what many people are drawn to barbershop for – camaraderie, belonging and, in this case, nostalgia.

The aforementioned article by Nash acts as a supporting piece to my estimations around age politics in barbershop, while also presenting a series of other issues (knowingly or otherwise) about conservative politics intersecting with the barbershop experience. Nash’s experience in Philadelphia showcases an environment where conservative American politics inform the perspective of many members of the ensemble – and perhaps that of a majority viewpoint in the American base of barbershop more broadly speaking. I can’t identify with Nash or the men he writes about in his article, and I categorically disagree with many of Nash’s theories or comments about singers he spends time with during his ethnographic research. Some of these comments stem from his observations of the group, and how they conceptualise performance. I discuss Nash’s article here in depth, as it poses a counter-discussion to my research and barbershop experience in Wellington, allowing for critical discussion and an

opportunity to discuss alternative experiences and perspectives of barbershop than that of my own.

On first impression, Nash's article posits barbershop as an "opportunity to observe and understand masculine identity and expressivity" (582), as he develops insider ethnographic methodology and discusses the acquisition of a barbershop habitus (as per Bourdieu). Nash then reels off a number of quotes which perhaps represent some of the problematic dialogue around barbershop singing, setting himself a task of "understanding how conventionally masculine males could be preoccupied with sentimentality and nostalgia in this hobby, and how they bond without crossing into gay identities" (585). The final part of this sentence is inherently problematic, as making an equivalence between sentimentality and adopting "gay identities" is close-minded and poorly conceptualised. Nash's short-sighted understanding of barbershop and masculinity persists over the course of the rest of the article, as he seems to write from the perspective of a demographic which is politically out-of-touch in a conservative way. He writes that "the men of the barbershop hobby are not destructive. They resist social change... especially in their choice to participate in an organization with the explicit goal of preserving an 'out-of-date' musical form" (586). While my experience is antithetical to that which Nash describes here, there is an underlying element of resisting social and musical change in barbershop music. Examples of this could include negative reactions to popular music sung in contests, or the results of the contest re-structure facet of the Everyone in Harmony initiative I mentioned earlier.

Conservatism is certainly present in barbershop circles, and Nash aligns this with Christianity and singing in a "manly" way (so as to preserve one's traditional masculinity). In terms of religion in barbershop, Nash suggests that "80 percent of the men in the barbershop choruses that I studied are self-identified protestant Christians" (586) – a large majority of the men he sings with and includes in his research. I have not found this to be as openly prevalent in New Zealand contexts, but there are modest facets of religiosity in Vocal FX. Often, the chorus will share a quick prayer in poignant moments or before a contest or performance, but religion is never forced upon the members of the chorus as such. Additionally, some of Vocal FX's non-contest repertoire draws from religious text or influence, including Biebl's "Ave Maria", Samoan hymn "Lota Nu'u" and at one stage "Whakaaria Mai" – the Māori setting of the well-

known hymn “How Great Thou Art”. I develop this conversation more in the following chapters, where I discuss this side of Vocal FX in more depth.

Conservativism

Social conservatism is not a part of the Vocal FX experience (or even the New Zealand barbershop experience, as far as I have seen), but seems prominent in Nash’s account of American barbershop. Nash writes a section based on “Joe Barbershopper” – the “moniker most frequently used in Barbershop Harmony Society literature to refer to the typical barbershopper” (589). His description is puzzling, writing that “while the BHS strives for a wide appeal, there can be no denying that the typical barbershop singer is middle- to old-aged, middle income, a church member, white, and he is decidedly conservative, politically and socially” (589). Vocal FX, perhaps in an anomalous sense, does not remotely fit this description. The age range for the chorus sits between 16-35 years old, includes a range of occupations (from high school and tertiary students to teachers, lawyers and accountants, and everything in between), is not blatantly religious, and I suspect sits in a liberal, left-wing side of the political spectrum. Even in terms of looks, Nash suggests that “in their appearances, barbershop singers would never be mistaken for avant-garde musicians: no earrings, flamboyant tattoos, or grungy fashion” (588). Vocal FX features all of that which Nash suggests barbershop singers are not, further perpetuating the ways in which this Wellington ensemble differs from traditional barbershop groups. That being said, many barbershoppers – globally, or in New Zealand contexts – would fit at least some of Nash’s description of “Joe Barbershopper”. The older demographic still dominates participation and membership in organizations around the world, and the sheer existence and excitement around “the old songs” still exists today. 21st-century repertoire is starting to become more common – just last year, Signature won the quartet contest with a rendition of Beyoncé’s “Listen” from *Dreamgirls*, for example – but by and large, the audiences still get excited to hear songs from established musical theatre and jazz standard contexts. Much of the existing conversations around barbershop in academic discourse are based in the world of older singers (either by or for that demographic). While there’s nothing wrong with this, there’s undeniably a scene of youth singers bubbling under this which are not accounted for in barbershop scholarship.

This is particularly true considering the prevalence of barbershop singing for youth singers in New Zealand. Guy Jansen, in his recent book *Sing New Zealand: The Story of Choral Music in Aotearoa* (2019) wrote that:

The popularity of barbershop has exploded since the 1990s, especially at secondary school level, with around 1500 high school students now involved in six regional contests. Interestingly, students typically take part in both regular school choirs and barbershop groups when they have the interest and time to do so. (Jansen 2019, 290)

Indeed, high school barbershop singing is a catalyst for singers to join Vocal FX or to continue singing barbershop into adulthood. Additionally, this youth demographic acts as the largest and most diverse demographic of barbershop singers in New Zealand, from an ethnicity and gender-based perspective (perhaps based purely on school systems and large turnout). Given Vocal FX's standing as New Zealand's elite ensemble, Wellington's bubbling youth scene acts as a key feeder into Vocal FX for male singers. Recently, Barbershop Harmony Society CEO Marty Monson travelled to New Zealand to observe the way in which the Young Singers in Harmony contests were run, so as to provide a template or example for how youth engagement can be managed and encouraged globally – marking New Zealand as a global leader in this context. In my experience, barbershop ensembles and leaders throughout wider New Zealand are picking up on the talent and expertise emanating from the youth scene as well. Barbershop Harmony New Zealand offers a system called Coaching Certification, whereby New Zealand's experts in barbershop pedagogy can be added to a list that ensembles throughout the country can tap into and ask for coaching. I was included as a Certified Coach in 2019, and part of my training involved a trip to Timaru, in the South Island of New Zealand, to work with a small mixed chorus of older singers. I had a particularly fun experience coaching these singers and I was heartened by the inclusion of women into a formerly male chorus, alongside a female director. Many of the members of the chorus noted that it was nice to have a young person coming to work with them, as they don't have youth singers in their chorus and find it difficult to attract them to sing with them. While I do not think barbershop ensembles in New Zealand have to have young singers, I admire those who are looking to the youth in this country for coaching and advice, instead of staying steadfast and preservationist in the traditional barbershop sense. Older singers – or barbershop singers more generally – don't have to resist social or musical change, and in New Zealand that seems to be the case.

Conclusion

Barbershop music appears to be moving in a more progressive direction with regards to social politics, in spite of the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and divides in barbershop contexts historically. While the basic essence of camaraderie will remain implicit in the singer's experience of the style – given the responsibility of each singer in a quartet, and the team-style roles fulfilled by chorus singers – the concept of belonging is in a state of flux. For a long time, barbershop music exemplified conservatism and exclusionary politics. My next two chapters point to benefits of questioning the norms of traditional roles assumed by singers, nation-states, and men. One can only consider and criticize the state of barbershop through looking at the bigger picture regarding the majority experience, and the experience of the minorities in barbershop (be that racial minorities, or affiliate organizations who are tiny in relation to the American organization). Barbershop is stuck between preserving a certain ideal and trying to diversify itself and modernize to move with the changing times (both musically and extra-musically). While this chapter exemplifies some of the issues that loom over barbershop organization in formal contexts, the rest of this thesis elucidates ways in which barbershoppers can challenge established norms and satisfy the intentions of the “Everyone in Harmony” initiative.

Chapter 2: “Lota Nu’u”: Vocal FX, and indigenous influence

This chapter engages directly with ethnographic research I conducted with Vocal FX chorus in Wellington, New Zealand, and considers how the chorus balances indigenous influence in their barbershop repertoire and performance. Firstly, I provide a history of Vocal FX. Secondly, I consider rehearsals and contests from the perspective of a Vocal FX singer. Finally, I consider the non-contest repertoire and influence in Vocal FX, discussing indigenous repertoire offered by musicians from Māori and Pacific Island contexts. This final section also includes a discussion around some of the unresolved issues that arise from cross-cultural engagement in music-making contexts. In exploring these processes, I elucidate the ways in which Vocal FX counters narratives of exclusion through diversity and the instilling of community-based values. This chapter develops my prior conversation around diversification and representation in barbershop, by displaying how a group from New Zealand challenges norms and expectations of who a barbershop chorus consists of, and what they sing.

Positionality

As I explained in my introduction, I joined Vocal FX in 2015, on the recommendation of a newly made friend (and existing chorus member) upon arriving in Wellington. After some initial doubts in a teething period where I wondered what my role could be as a young singer within a world-class choral ensemble, I became a full-time member by April/May of that year. Since then, I have travelled with Vocal FX to two International Conventions (Nashville in 2016, Orlando in 2018), as well as a Pan-Pacific convention (Sydney 2017), and a number of Barbershop Harmony New Zealand National Conventions. In 2017, I joined the Music Leadership Team (which I’ll refer to as “Music Team” where applicable) as the Lead Section Leader – a position I still hold within the chorus. I often conduct warm-up (vocal pedagogy) sessions for the chorus, leading sectional or half-chorus sessions within a chorus rehearsal and, in recent times, standing out front with the directors to offer comments and occasionally direct the chorus. While this puts me in a privileged position from a musical leadership perspective, I do not believe my position on the Music Team impedes or alters my ability to partake in transparent, honest ethnographic research. Rather, I would argue the opposite. I have been able to form meaningful relationships with most, if not all, members of the chorus through a myriad of contexts – either as a leader within the chorus, as a singer on the risers,

or as a friend in social situations. This ethnographic research (particularly that of the final chapter) would not be possible if not for these relationships, which exist in part due to my visibility and vocal presence within the ensemble. Naturally, there remains potential that members may feel as if they were unable to speak critically about Vocal FX given my proximity to the directorship and leadership of the ensemble. While I did not explicitly encounter this or see this in my interview process, it is possible (and worth acknowledging) that members may have held back on discussing certain facets of the chorus (or felt inclined to say what they thought I wanted them to say), and that would potentially influence my research findings.

My ethnographic approach involved two modes of direct interaction with the chorus – observing rehearsals, concerts and contests, and interviewing eleven members of the chorus (around a quarter of the members at that time). My observations involved taking written notes at rehearsals and reflecting on important moments immediately afterwards. For concerts and contests, where I was more directly involved in the ensemble as a performer and musical leader, I opted to write reflections after important events to remind me of important moments that occurred in these settings. I observed Vocal FX for a period of about three months, which encapsulated numerous rehearsals, a concert and the ensembles performance at the Barbershop Harmony New Zealand National Convention in Christchurch. The interviews were conducted during the same timeframe. In the latter half of this chapter, where I discuss diversity and indigenous influence, I privilege the voices of my interviewees given their closer proximity to the musical material. These interviewees include various Māori and Samoan singers, some of whom are singers who develop, teach and occasionally direct the indigenous repertoire learned and performed by Vocal FX.

Vocal FX History

Vocal FX was founded in 2003 by Charlotte Murray and Les Nation, to promote barbershop singing for youth singers in an immediate post-high school demographic. The chorus originated as an offshoot of Harbour Capital Chorus (HCC); an established chorus based in Wellington that still sings today.

I asked a couple of the longer-serving members of Vocal FX about the early days of the chorus, so as to get a first-hand account. This came from one of the originating members of the chorus:

So, I sang with HCC and just did the men's stuff and was semi-involved in Young Singers from an organizational perspective. And then Vocal FX formed, and I jumped in on that bandwagon and the rest is history... it might have been 2003, because the first year there was only 8 or 9 of us. We'd literally have rehearsals where an entire voice part wouldn't be there... if one of us couldn't make it, then it was just like "cool we have no basses or baritones today!" Back in the early days the agreement with HCC was we'd have our rehearsal for the first hour in a room by ourselves, and then we'd go join HCC for the rest of their rehearsal... (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 16/8/19)

The chorus has come a long way since these days. The understanding this member gave me of the early days of Vocal FX was invaluable, given the lack of written history on the ensemble. Harbour Capital Chorus would have had quite a good deal based on this arrangement, as they were in a position of fostering young talent who would also sing in their chorus. Eventually, Vocal FX broke off and became their own entity independent of Harbour Capital Chorus.

I also asked this singer about the stand-out moments he recalled from being in the chorus for the entirety of its existence:

I think our first trip overseas was a massive memory... we kind of saw it as a once-off, it wasn't the start of a journey it was "this is the one and only chance we're gonna get to go and compete internationally so let's make it a big massive thing", and it turns out it's been roughly every two years since. That was never the expectation, or the goal of it... (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 16/8/19)

That trip took place in 2007 to Denver, Colorado, where the ensemble placed 11th out of 31 choruses competing. The chorus has returned to the International Contest five times since, placing 10th, 7th, 10th, 6th, and 9th respectively – establishing Vocal FX as a world-class, youth-based barbershop chorus.

As I wrote in Chapter 1, New Zealand's high-school barbershop singing programme is popular (particularly in more recent years), as thousands of singers from around the country partake in the Young Singers in Harmony program in choruses and quartets. With that being said, there was (and is still) a noticeable drop-off between the number of singers who sing

barbershop at high school and those who continue to sing barbershop in their adult lives. Vocal FX was formed with youth retention and opportunity as a core value – a philosophy which the group has maintained to this day. In 2015, Jeff Hunkin became the co-director of the chorus – re-entering the group with two other members of 2014 International Quartet Champions Musical Island Boys, after they had taken time away from the group during the height of their competitive quartet success. The Musical Island Boys quartet act as a major influence for Vocal FX, both in terms of literal influence on singing in the chorus, and through their trailblazing efforts as Pacific Island/Māori singers competing in international contests².

Over the course of the chorus's life, but in the last seven years especially, Vocal FX has become renowned internationally as a top-level chorus, frequently finishing in the mid-tier of the Top 10 choruses in the world when competing at the Barbershop Harmony Society International Contest (usually every two years). In my time, the group has come 6th and 9th respectively, and has taken on the reputation as somewhat of a trailblazer or pioneer in the newly created "Performance" category (formerly "Presentation", which judged on different criteria to those I discussed in Chapter 1). In particular, Vocal FX's performance of "Funk Medley" in Nashville in 2016 shook up expectations of performance within the Barbershop Harmony Society's American hub – largely due to the incorporation of a haka in the performance. I explore this further in the following two sections of this chapter, where I consider contests and rehearsals, and the influence of indigenous cultures on the output of this ensemble.

Contests and Rehearsals

One could make an argument that the two most important facets of an ensemble are how they rehearse and how they present themselves to an audience (in either a formal or informal setting). A third, barbershop-inclined argument would advocate for the importance of interpersonal relations and friendships fostered through being a member of a chorus, like Vocal FX. This section regards how this ensemble rehearses, and the sort of repertoire, pedagogical approaches and musical conceptualisation employed in these rehearsals in the lead up to a

² Jeff and Will Hunkin are half-Samoan and half-Niuean, lead singer Lusa Washburn is Samoan, and bass singer Matt Gifford is "half Cook Island and New Zealand Māori", as per an article on Stuff.co.nz (<https://web.archive.org/web/20111020225400/http://barbershop.org/news-a-events-main/587-musical-island-boys-featured-in-new-zealand-press.html>).

contest. Additionally, I explore the repertoire sung by Vocal FX in competitive contexts, except for the prospective Los Angeles 2020 set, which I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

I conducted my research and performed with Vocal FX in the lead-up to the Barbershop Harmony New Zealand (BHNZ) National Convention, held in Christchurch in September 2019. Vocal FX had won the Chorus Contest in 2018, so had to stand down from formal competition as part of BHNZ legislation to diversify the winning choruses (largely due to the gap in scoring between Vocal FX and other choruses in New Zealand, where sometimes the gap between Vocal FX and the next best chorus can be close to 20%). In any event, Vocal FX was still required to sing for a score (known as “singing for evaluation only”) in order to qualify for the Barbershop Harmony Society International Convention to be held in Los Angeles in July 2020. This is a complicated situation for the ensemble to find itself in, particularly for its more competitively minded members. There are no medals up for grabs, only a number which largely serves to allocate Vocal FX a seeding placement for the much more important International Contest in 2020. With that in mind, the group still strives for artistic excellence despite what is effectively a non-contest for the ensemble. As I discuss rehearsals and contests in the following sections, I have largely followed the template of the rehearsals I experienced during my ethnographic fieldwork period and based my contest fieldwork on the Christchurch experience.

Rehearsals

A Vocal FX rehearsal takes place once a week, on Monday nights from 7pm until 9 or 9:30pm at Tawa College just outside of Wellington. Many members are based either in the Wellington CBD and commute out to Tawa (carpooling, trains, buses), commute in from neighbouring suburbs, or live in Tawa. The arrangement came about through Charlotte being a teacher in the Music Department at Tawa College, and the chorus permanently relocated their rehearsals there, after initially being set up at Onslow College in Johnsonville during the early times of the chorus. Vocal FX rehearses in a modern rehearsal space, with numerous practice rooms utilised throughout the rehearsal for sectional time as well. A typical rehearsal will begin with one or two members of the Music Team taking a “warm-up” session, devoted to increasing knowledge of basic vocal production and technique through a number of breathing, physical and vocal exercises so that the members of the chorus are primed to sing

for the following two hours. It is also worth acknowledging here that a variety of levels of musical and/or vocal knowledge exist within Vocal FX – some members have formal training, many do not, and there are varying degrees of experience with reading or conceptualising sheet music. Many members lean on these pedagogy sessions for learning vocal technique, and in fact even members of the Music Team have become proficient through spending a number of years learning through the chorus, rather than through classical or formalised voice training. In recent times, Jeff has taken the lead on implementing certain vocal pedagogy exercises into the group during this part of the rehearsal, to establish specific terminology and/or “work on” areas for the ensemble that he can refer back to throughout the rest of the rehearsal.

Following the warm-up session, the directors greet the group, and often begin rehearsal with a performance of a “show-tune” – a song that isn’t for contest, but rather falls within a contemporary a cappella style to be sung at concerts and other events. In recent times, these songs have come from the catalogues of artists such as Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind & Fire, and Marvin Gaye – further reinforcing a distinct R&B and Soul influence within the chorus. These early rehearsal sing-throughs give chorus members an opportunity to loosen up and perform material which is fun, and potentially less vocally demanding than contest material. Furthermore, it allows the directors to evaluate the group’s “base-level” performance (i.e. what the group sounds and looks like by default), and give comments based on what they see and hear which can apply to other songs rehearsed during the night. The remainder of the rehearsal is split into rehearsing sections of a song – be that based around vocal pedagogy, musicality or choreography/visual performance. In part due to Charlotte’s position as a BHS Performance judge, the chorus has a large focus on the performance category and the embodiment of any given song. Vocal pedagogy might be provided by Jeff or a member of the Music Team, and Charlotte will often ask members to consider how they are performing or what they are trying to portray at any given point of any song (competitive or not). These song sections are rehearsed equally as an ensemble and in sectionals or duets, where a section leader will take charge of directing one or two voice parts through any given section of a song.

Contests and repertoire

Contests bring a different level of intensity and focus to Vocal FX rehearsals – especially in the lead-up to an international contest. Rehearsals will run 30 minutes longer and be driven much harder by the directors and Music Team. The pedagogical approach tends to lean on getting singers to buy into their role as a contributor to the chorus as a whole, playing into Faulkner and Davidson’s discussion of homosociality and collaboration, whereby singular voices contribute to a homogenous group sound – pivotal to the sound of an elite barbershop ensemble – and getting singers to thrive in competitive or pressure-based contexts through trusting the singers around them.

Part of the pedagogical approach which stood out to me during my observations of the chorus was analogy and metaphor. Sporting metaphor, in particular, acts as a key mediator in the learning process, as many chorus members don’t have vocal or musical training but can derive meaning from metaphor that they can identify with. As stated earlier, many members of the chorus are not trained singers or musicians, and thus many of the concepts that are applied throughout rehearsals could be new or difficult to conceptualise. Directors will often make use of metaphor or analogy to find abstract ways of communicating highly musical concepts in less theoretical ways. Given that only a few members have strong theory backgrounds, often concepts like chord balancing or tuning intervals fall to music team members to explain and tinker with in abstract, non-theoretical terms. Some of these analogies turn to sporting metaphor or physical gesture to communicate anything from vocal placement (i.e. forward tone vs. dark tone, resonating chambers) through to developing on the role each member plays in the chorus, as per Faulkner and Davidson’s discussion of co-operation and collaboration in homo-vocal spaces. Jeff will often compare the gritty rehearsals to going to the gym to do exercise; will refer to dance groups as teams (or in the case of the Los Angeles set, the “First XV” – directly linking that group to rugby in New Zealand), and will tap into the competitive nature of barbershop chorus singing to push singers along at difficult points (sometimes referring to the extra half-hour as “champs hour”). The nature of sporting metaphor and/or ideology brings an edge and an intensity to rehearsals that is not as prevalent in non-international contest years. The intensity crosses over into the expectations for singers within the chorus, in that the lead-up to international contests requires a large degree of commitment from members of the chorus. This process includes sending regular

recordings to section leaders and directors at each stage of the learning process, which includes note-learning, interpretation, and vocal tone throughout a singer's range. Singers are required to have an 80% minimum attendance record for rehearsals and have to attend extra retreat rehearsals during some weekends for more intensive sessions (or to work with guest coaches). As such, being in Vocal FX (or any barbershop chorus working to this goal) becomes an intense, time-consuming part of one's life. In my interviews, I spoke with some of the members about the difficulty of spending time away from family (either during Monday night rehearsals, weekend retreats, or contest trips), and making sacrifices to be in the ensemble. These conversations, in my experience, seem more common in international contest years, as the competitive vibe drives the key leaders and members of the chorus to give of their time and energy to help produce an unforgettable contest performance.

Vocal FX membership

In light of this, I became interested in why people come to Vocal FX, why they stay, and why they commit so much of their time, energy (and resources) to being in this ensemble. My interview process allowed me to speak to several singers from the chorus with varying degrees of experience with Vocal FX or with singing in general, all the way from newer members to returning members up to members of the directorship team, so as to present a holistic view of the chorus experience.

Of the singers I spoke to, many pointed to the Young Singers in Harmony (YSIH) program in New Zealand as one of the ways that they were either introduced to barbershop, or even singing more broadly. A couple of my interviewees spoke about this at length:

On one of my first music classes in Year 9, my teacher asked me to stay behind before lunch, and I thought I was in trouble. He brings me into this room with a bunch of seniors, and he gets me to sing with them. At first, I was real adamant I was just going to stare at the music and not sing... in the end I loosened up and started singing and it all just kicked off. I joined the all-comers choir, joined the barbershop group and started taking singing lessons. It ended up becoming a big thing with [my quartet], where we wanted to win [the National contest]. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

Another singer spoke of the high school experience, and a pivotal performance which inspired them to want to pursue singing in the coming years:

I got introduced to barbershop at [high school] as well... one year we did a chorus and went to the Nationals for that. I don't remember how we did, but it was cool to see that. I think, it might have been Year 10, that was when we saw Westminster Chorus who were down... that hit me aye, like I wanted to do that... that was so powerful, and seeing how they could use their emotion and perform. Seeing that at Year 10, I just wanted to do singing more. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

I remember the performance this singer speaks of, which was part of the one of the two Westminster Chorus tours of New Zealand that I spoke of in my introduction. The tour took place in 2014, and Westminster Chorus were the guest act at the Young Singers in Harmony National contest. They performed a stirring version of "Bridge Over Troubled Water" which moved many young people in the audience to tears, and inspired singers to pursue barbershop. We reminisced, in the moments following the above quote, about how influential that performance was for both of us and potentially for many other singers who are now in Vocal FX. Furthermore, many Vocal FX singers had a chance to converse with Westminster Chorus singers in the years following and discuss how meaningful this performance was to each of us.

Others spoke candidly about alternative ways of arriving at barbershop, outside of the more common school-based path:

I used to absolutely hate barbershop, with a passion, because my dad sings barbershop and we'd get dragged along to the concerts and as kids we hated it. When I got to about 14, Dad was leaving to Nationals... and two days before I was randomly like "Can I come with you?" ... and then I got into barbershop through him. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 16/8/19)

The family link is probably an understated one in New Zealand contexts, as barbershop music is still reasonably young in this country. However, given the emergence of a youth scene, more and more young singers are likely being exposed to barbershop music through family links. Other singers I spoke to discussed seeing a sibling or a member of their extended family sing barbershop, and that that was the catalyst for their involvement.

Another singer spoke about stumbling on Vocal FX as their introductory point to barbershop music:

It was a strange turn of events. Vocal FX was my first introduction to it really. I was at a musical theatre rehearsal for [a show] and I was there with [an existing member of the chorus], and he was in that show as well. In that rehearsal we were talking, and I'd heard the girls do some harmonies and it just sounded brilliant, it was just ringing chords (and I didn't recognise it) and I thought "man this is why I do shows, because I love hearing harmony and hearing that ringing of sound", and he said "well, if you really enjoy ringing of chords and harmonies, you need to come to Vocal FX and listen... come along and see what you think. So, the next Monday I went with him, and got hooked almost instantly. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

This story is a more uncommon one, but one that I would expect to become more common as more young singers hear and begin to participate in barbershop music. While there is an inherent feeder system from high school, some singers will arrive randomly at barbershop and have their experience of the style shaped by the group they originate with. For this singer, his experience of barbershop concepts and singing is likely to be markedly different to high school singers or singers in other parts of the world, given the unique nature of Vocal FX.

These different anecdotes about arriving at barbershop showcase how prominent the high school system can be insofar as hooking singers on this musical style, while also displaying how people can arrive at barbershop from all walks of life. These different introductions to barbershop music, and the contexts in which they occur, point to a diverse set of life experience and character brought to an ensemble by each member – contributing to the diverse make-up of the ensemble. I joked with one of the interviewees that everyone has a somewhat wacky story about how they arrived at barbershop, and I think this holds true.

Diasporic flow, and the influence of Māori and Pacific Island traditions

One of these unique facets of Vocal FX, and the diverse membership within the ensemble, is the multicultural influence in both the groups basic operations and in its musical performance. Repertoire forms a key part of this discussion, as Vocal FX prides itself on performing music special to their own members, and also for performing music that other choruses couldn't do (i.e. complicatedly choreographed dance/funk routines through to "cultural" numbers). Indeed, that serves as my impetus for contributing to the group, as I feel that musicians seldom have the opportunity to present a challenge to an entire style or genre

of music-making, and geography and diversity both to contribute to creating a distance between Vocal FX and the Barbershop Harmony Society – a distance which allows us to work on the edges of the musical style. Building on my prior discussion of contest repertoire, this section explores Vocal FX’s non-contest repertoire and the two-song set Vocal FX will perform at the Los Angeles International Contest to be held in July 2020. Much of this discussion emanates from personal experience of particular performances, chorus retreats, and rehearsals, as well as further drawing from conversations I had with members of the chorus this year.

World Harmony Jamboree/Showcase

Vocal FX’s key non-competitive performance when attending an International Convention takes place at the World Harmony Showcase (formerly the World Harmony Jamboree³) held during the same week as the contest, but often after the chorus competition. The Jamboree is an initiative driven by the World Harmony Council (WHC), which formed in 1989 to progress the “development of men’s barbershop harmony singing in the world” (World Harmony Council n.d.), under the initial direction of Ed Waesche⁴. The WHC website suggests that the first international show (later given the Jamboree name) was held at the 1990 San Francisco convention, and included representation from all groups which were “active or Society-affiliated barbershop organizations”. The concert raises funds for international barbershop, and has so far raised over \$500,000, according to the WHC website.

Vocal FX regularly takes this opportunity to share elements of New Zealand and Pacific Island music in this setting, given the looser requirements around show-singing in contrast to competitive barbershop. I have performed with the group at two of these events and have found the performance to be liberating and fun, especially in light of the pressure of competition. Instead of formal suit attire, Vocal FX will often wear a t-shirt and jeans with no shoes for this concert, contributing to a more informal vibe. In 2016, we sang two songs (“He Kākano Ahau” and “Karanga Karanga”) and performed a haka designed by a Māori singer from within the chorus. I spoke to the chorus member who led the “cultural set” in 2016, and

³ This is the name used more commonly by Vocal FX (likely due to the recency of the name change), and therefore is the event name I use throughout this chapter.

⁴ Waesche is a member of the Barbershop Harmony Society Hall of Fame and sits within the upper echelon of barbershop arrangers and/or singers. He was a highly influential figure within the Society, having additionally served as SPEBSQSA president during his time as a barbershopper.

discussed how integrating Māori repertoire into the chorus scenario went from his perspective, as a Māori singer:

I was quite proud and excited to see so many of the non-Māori, even the Pacific Islanders who are non-Māori, getting involved. I want to see, even just across the world, indigenous cultures having a strong part... like in Australia, North America, so I have a sort of bias towards that. It was good to see everyone keen and involved, and there was no friction at all... by the time we took it over to America, that sense of pride and just seeing it in people's faces too... When we were able to, over in America, show [Performance Coach David McEachern⁵] our appreciation through our cultural identity, that felt pretty cool. It was cool watching everyone get on board, and it was instant. As soon as it started, everyone didn't even hesitate and just got into it. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 9/9/19)

The idea within this set was to pay tribute to Māori culture within New Zealand, a theme which ran into our contest set in that year in the "Funk Medley". We learned "Karanga" during a chorus retreat to Takapuwahia Marae in Porirua, a weekend designed for the chorus to extensively rehearse contest material with an international coach/judge and learn about the "cultural" context of the music sung in the Jamboree setting. This tradition has continued in recent years (even in years without an international contest trip in them), as we have developed a relationship with Whakarongotai Marae in Waikanae.

Singing "He Kākano Ahau", provided a strong learning experience for myself and the three friends with whom I sing in a quartet, as none of us are Māori. In a sense, we were asked to be at the forefront of the embodiment and performance of the Māori lyrics by being soloist and/or featured performers, so the onus was on the four of us to engage with and accurately represent the text of the song. We consulted frequently with the aforementioned leader of this "cultural set" at each stage of the learning process as to how to approach performing this music, and how best to convey the themes of the lyrics to audiences unfamiliar with Māori language. The song features the following lyrics:

⁵ I discuss BHS Performance Judge/Coach David McEachern's work with Vocal FX in more depth throughout Chapter 3.

He kākano āhau
I ruia mai I Rangiatea
And I can never be lost
I am a seed, born of greatness
Descended from a line of chiefs,
He kākano āhau

Ki hea rā āu e hitekiteki ana
Kā mau tonu I āhau ōku tikānga
Tōku reo, tōku reo oho-oho,
Tōku reo, tōku māpihi maurea
Tōku whakakai marihi
My language is my strength,
An ornament of grace

Ka tū ana āhau,
Ka ūhia au e ōku tīpuna
My pride I will show
That you may know who I am
I am a warrior, a survivor
He mōrehu āhau

Ki hea rā āu e hitekiteki ana
Kā mau tonu I āhau ōku tikānga
Tōku reo, tōku reo oho-oho,
Tōku reo, tōku māpihi maurea
Tōku whakakai marihi
My language is my strength,
An ornament of grace

I am a seed
Scattered from Rangiatea
And I can never be lost
I am a seed, born of greatness,
Descended from a line of chiefs,
I am a seed.

Wherever I may roam
I will hold fast to my traditions
My language is my cherished possession
My language is the object of my affection
My precious adornment
My language is my strength
An ornament of grace

Whenever I stand,
I am clothed by my ancestors
My pride I will show
That you may know who I am
I am a warrior, a survivor
I am a remnant

Wherever I may roam
I will hold fast to my traditions.
My language is my cherished possession
My treasured Tiger Shell
My precious ornament
My language is my strength,
An ornament of grace

*Figure 2: Māori lyrics and translation of “He Kākano Ahau”. Source: New Zealand Folksong,
http://www.folksong.org.nz/he_Kākano_ahau/index.html*

The theme of the song is based on the idea of language and heritage being strong influences in any setting for any group of people – especially those from indigenous communities like Māori. The role of tradition and paying tribute to ancestry is another strong theme throughout these lyrics, which is not too far away from the looming role tradition plays in barbershop singing more generally.

The way this song was conceptualised and performed by Vocal FX was different to the normal approach for the ensemble, in that there was no notation used at all. Rather, the structure of the arrangement was conceptualised by the leader of this “cultural set”, and the harmonies were fleshed out instinctively by singers within the chorus familiar with how lush harmonic textures should sound. Very few singers in the chorus at this time were Māori beyond the singer leading this performance, but many singers with musical training or experience singing in other musical contexts (i.e. church or Pacific Island-based music-making contexts) brought aspects of their harmony singing to the song. This led to expanded harmony beyond four parts – a rare occurrence for this chorus. Certain “pillar chords” featured as many as seven parts, with singers adding major 7ths, major 9ths and 11ths to existing triadic harmony to create a dense texture.

Guy Jansen writes about this in *Sing New Zealand: The Story of Choral Music in Aotearoa* (2019), saying:

Māori culture became infiltrated by a Western musical system, but there were differences: finding the harmony of a song was not taught by a tutor but was left to individuals within the group. There was no conductor; the singer’s ear dictated where one should go musically. This aural/aesthetic ability is not confined to Māori, but has become a marked feature of disciplined, beautiful choral singing at Māori performing arts festivals. (Jansen 2019, 22)

The Vocal FX learning process, as guided by a Māori singer, seems somewhat accurate insofar as traditional indigenous approaches to harmony singing, as singing by ear was prioritised over Westernised notation-based approaches more commonplace in barbershop singing contexts. The arrangement of “He Kākano Ahau” did feature some distinctly barbershop chorus “show tune” elements – two soloists were featured, as well as a quartet feature in the pre-chorus. I was fortunate enough to be one of the two soloists (the other being Jeff, the director), and to have sung in the quartet featured in the arrangement.

In Orlando in 2018, we drew from the strong Samoan influence in the ensemble for the “cultural set”, singing Samoan hymn “Lota Nu’u”, and “We Know the Way” from *Moana*, as well as performing a Samoan dance called a fa’ataupati as an ensemble. Again, the fa’ataupati, taught by Samoan members of the chorus, presented an opportunity for non-Samoan members of the group to learn about a performative facet of Samoan culture in a

safe zone, and to challenge themselves to become adept at this brisk, physical dance. Many of us, myself included, found this to be a physical challenge, but also an invaluable opportunity to learn what various gestures (and the way one should perform them) meant in the context of Samoan culture. While I had come across fa'ataupati in academic contexts during my studies in New Zealand, I learned far more from being immersed in the performance side of it and was grateful for the unique opportunity to engage with Samoan culture, as a white Pākehā New Zealander, in this hands-on setting.

This performance was meaningful for Pacific Island singers in the chorus too, some of whom spoke about this in interviews I conducted. I spoke to the Samoan singer who drove the direction of this “cultural set”, and asked about the process of integrating Samoan repertoire and dance into Vocal FX's performance:

I think there was a time in 2014 where 60% of us – 65% probably – were islanders. We'd always do hakas and some sort of “cultural set” in America, so it sort of just built from that... We've just always done some sort of cultural item. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

I noted to this singer that I felt as if the chorus really enjoyed singing Pacific Island repertoire, to which he responded:

I think sometimes I'm not sure if the boys enjoy it or not... I think one thing that I worry about the most is “are those guys enjoying it?” So, when I see them hyped [to perform this material], I'm like “sweet!” (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

One of the conversations that popped up repeatedly in interviews was how songs like “Lota Nu'u” came to take on new meanings related to singing with the “brothers” in the chorus, rather than the original meaning of the lyric. The lyrics for “Lota Nu'u” follow below:

Lo Ta Nu'u Ua Ou Fanau Ai

Lo ta nu-u, ua ou fanau ai	My dear country, where I was born
Lalelei oe I, le vasa e	You are the most beautiful in the ocean
Ua e maua, mai luga	You have obtained from above
O le tofi, aoga	A most important inheritance/duty
<i>Chorus:</i>	
Samoana, (Samoana)	People of Samoa
Ala mai, (Ala mai)	Arise (wake up)
Fai ai nei, (Fai ai nei)	Give (now)
Le fa'afetai, (Le fa'afetai)	Your thanksgiving
I le pule, ua mau ai	To the Most High, who gave you
O lou nu'u, I le vasa	Your island/country, here in the ocean

Figure 3: "Lota Nu'u" lyrics, traditional Samoan hymn. Source: <https://1samoana.com/samoana-ala-mai-translating-lota-nuu/>

The song communicates a patriotic and somewhat religious love of Samoa, giving thanks to a deity for giving these people Samoa, the "most beautiful in the ocean". For many singers in Vocal FX, there is a direct application of these lyrics. We were taught the song aurally by members of the chorus who were familiar with the song, largely through its original church hymn context. As time has passed in the two years since learning the song, it has taken on a special new meaning for the chorus. While in the next chapter I discuss ideas of emotional expression in barbershop music, part of the discussion emanating from performing Māori and Samoan songs is the idea of attributing thematic and/or emotional value to songs or languages from contexts outside of those that non-Māori or Pacific Islander singers engage with in their everyday lives. As mentioned in my introduction, this was one of two songs we sang in the hotel lobby of the Rosen Centre in Orlando after the chorus contest in 2018, arm-in-arm with each member of the chorus. In August this year, we sang the song to Charlotte after she returned from the US, where she was part of the first group of women to become judges in the Barbershop Harmony Society. Finally, and most recently, we sang the song with (and for) Jeff's father as he came to visit the ensemble. That particular performance was shared by Jeff, the Association of International Champions, and Pacific Island news outlet

Tagata Pasifika in New Zealand, amassing well over 300,000 views in just a couple of months. “Lota Nu’u”, then, perhaps represents being thankful for each other in Vocal FX, and we use it to celebrate each other’s company and achievements in special moments.

In terms of future “cultural sets”, the link between Vocal FX and Māori culture is being further strengthened by a new haka, written by the same Māori chorus member who drove the 2016 “cultural set”. In speaking to this member, he had discussed in our interview how at his Māori immersion school, there was a haka that all students learned upon arriving at the beginning of their schooling there. All students who passed through the school would learn this haka, so that when someone started up the haka, everyone who had ever passed through that school would be able to connect to one another (and tradition) by performing together. The idea behind this new Vocal FX haka was to create a similar tradition for chorus members. The Māori text and translation follows:

Ko te Kāhui Kūoro tākina e!

Hi ha, hi ha!

Piki ake kake ake

Ngā Kōpūrehe

Ngā Kōkōuri

Kōmitimiti ngā hau e wha
Pāhekoheko ana mā ngākau
pono

Mā te kōrihi mā ngā parata

Pūkare, pūkare, pūkare rā

Tēnei te reo o ākengokengo

Tēnei to reo o te kūoro e

Panguru, mārū, rōreka, hīere

Aku parata, aku parata

Rūruku, Herenga

Āue..

Vocal FX Ascend!

Hi ha, hi ha!

Legions climb the mountain,

Like the chiefly male tui

*The fusion of four part harmony drawing
us together from far and wide*

*Remaining united through the common
passion for barbershop*

*An expressive art from connecting us to
each other,*

*An expressing art form connecting us to
ourselves*

This is the voice of tomorrow,

This is the voice of barbershop

*Achieved through the unity of basses,
baritones, leads and tenors*

My brothers in arms, my brothers in arms

Bonded until the end

Aue..

Figure 4: Vocal FX haka, 2019

It remains to be seen as to whether this haka will be used or taught in the lead-up to the Los Angeles contest in 2020. In any event, the fact that it was composed and shared with members of the chorus points to a continuation of cross-cultural engagement within the context of Vocal FX's performances. The text of the haka engages directly with the members of the chorus and gives each of them something relatable about Vocal FX to consider and be proud of while performing it. There seems to be a real feeling around New Zealand barbershop about promoting indigenous culture and, for Vocal FX, so much of this is driven by the directorship – particularly that of Jeff, as a singer of Samoan heritage. One of my interviewees spoke about his influence at length:

The fantastic masculinity expressed by Jeff when he's standing in front of a group of young men... He's modelling emotional vulnerability, candidness about Pacific identity, about modelling healthy communication, modelling how you can build a community around conversation and not violence. Every single week, we're developing our competencies in gender, in culture, in all of these really important ways. And cumulatively, that's going to pay dividends in terms of our performance because the training that we're receiving. Yes, we get the vocal training, but that cultural development is critical to our success, I think. We've being developed as an ensemble on how to be better men, how to feel more comfortable with our identities and cultures, no matter what those are. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 15/8/19)

Many other people I spoke to during my fieldwork process expressed similar sentiments, that Jeff's drive and pride for indigeneity manifests itself in the repertoire and performance style of Vocal FX. As anecdotes and examples from "cultural sets" performed by Vocal FX above display, it is this indigeneity and openness to expressing oneself through these cultures that acts as a point of difference between Vocal FX and other elite barbershop ensembles globally. Diasporic flow provides the initial vehicle for musical expression here, but it is the open experience of indigenous music-making shared by many members of the ensemble which allows for a unique perspective on barbershop singing to be had by this group.

Unresolved issues and future interactions with indigeneity

While Vocal FX presents a model as to how cross-cultural engagement can be navigated in barbershop contexts, there will always be questions of respectfulness when working through cross-cultural engagement and performance. One of Vocal FX's social strengths is the fact that

its members will willingly and fully try any mode of performance and feel safe doing so. Even for white singers, the context is deemed safe enough that they can be fearless and proud when engaging with facets of Māori or Pacific Island culture. I spoke to one of the Vocal FX singers of Pacific Island descent about this:

What I've found wonderful is that our Anglo-Saxon and our white contingent have just embraced it. There's been no questions, no qualms, there's no one been upset by it or no one saying, "it's too difficult for me to learn", everyone's just embraced it, and I feel like that is amazing. The hard thing for the Anglo-Saxon side is how do you identify what that culture is? For me, I was raised in a very British, UK upbringing. My mother's Scottish, my grandparents are Scottish, and my father's Tahitian, but all his family lived in Tahiti and we had nothing to do with them as I was growing up, so it was a very traditional English upbringing... which was personally for me, a bit of an identity crisis because it was like, here's this very externally looking cultural minority, yet being totally raised in this very English upbringing. So, for me, I didn't really attribute my British-Scottish upbringing, culturally, to any type of music. So, I couldn't attribute the way I identified as a white male with singing, other than church. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, 6/9/19)

We continued by discussing the ascribing of sub-textual value onto non-English lyrics:

That's only happened because we've embraced it as a group... if you don't understand necessarily what the song is about, but you have attributed meaning to it, then it has this different meaning to it, which I think is quite cool. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, 6/9/19)

I think these are unique experiences, certainly in my life experience growing up as a Pākehā white man in New Zealand, and potentially a model for how people in this country can engage with indigeneity. That whole interaction is predicated on the openness of those who bring in the Māori or Samoan language, songs and cultural dance, as they take the time to teach songs or movements, and give detailed explanation as to what it all means (or could mean to singers from outside of those cultures). Even if singers do not adopt the traditional meaning, they can find and ascribe new meaning based on how these songs can stir people when sung in various environments, which is also an intriguing example of cross-cultural mediation through music. There are potential unresolved issues in these interactions though, particularly when considering processes of being respectful to indigenous contexts that the ensemble borrows from. The terminology of "cultural set" is flawed and inadvertently communicates difference,

although the blurring of the lines between this performance context and the contest performance context is accelerating for Vocal FX. In addition, what happens when Māori and Pacific Island singers cannot attend a rehearsal or a performance? Is it still appropriate to perform these songs without actively diverse representation?

The complicated nature of this conversation is amplified when considering Vocal FX's upcoming campaign to compete at the International Chorus Contest, to be held in July 2020. The ensemble's contest set for the Los Angeles convention draws heavily from the experience and enjoyment the chorus has felt when singing at the World Harmony Showcase, and by extension from indigenous influence emanating from the chorus. The directors felt that the way in which the chorus sang in these settings was the most honest and true that they could be, and a lot of that came from the indigenous influence in the repertoire. With that in mind, Vocal FX commissioned two arrangements from arguably the two leading arrangers in the society (David Wright and Aaron Dale). The ballad is a new arrangement of "Pokarekare Ana", and the up-tune is a medley of "How Far I'll Go" and "We Know the Way" from *Moana*. The chorus is heavily in contest mode as I conclude my work on this thesis, with chorus retreats scheduled (including at Whakarongotai Marae in Waikanae) throughout the first half of the year with guest coaches from North America. While the choreography is not complete at the time of writing, much of the performance conceptualisation and staging emanates from Māori and Pacific Island dance or cultural custom. Furthermore, singing "Pokarekare Ana" and "How Far I'll Go/We Know The Way (Medley)" provides Vocal FX with a unique opportunity to sing in non-English languages – namely Māori, Samoan and Tokelauan – on the International Contest stage, which is believed to be the first time this has happened in the chorus contest.

This performance contributes again to questions of indigenous influence and respectful cross-cultural engagement in the style. Both arrangers for this contest set are Americans, and the music for contests is often dissected and crafted by members of the Music Leadership Team – many of whom are Pākehā New Zealanders (myself included). Politically and socially, it remains unresolved as to whether these interactions with Māori and Samoan lyrics and songs are respectful and appropriate. Furthermore, singing in non-English language at an International Chorus Contest leads to quirky moments of live translation in the arrangements – particularly in "Pokarekare Ana" (see Figure 5) in Verse 3. The bass voice sings the Māori

lyrics, while the remaining three voices effectively sing a live, Māori-to-English translation as the backing parts for this solo.

VERSE 3

love, Ah, my love for you will nev - er from the sun go dry.

E ko-re te a - ro - ha e ma-ro-ke i te ra, Ma-ku-ku to-nu

It's moist-ened for - ev - er by the tears I cry. Hear my cry: Dear-est

i a-ku ro-i-ma-ta e. my cry:-

Figure 5: Verse 3 from “Pokarekare Ana”, arranged by David Wright for Vocal FX, 2019

This technique has been used once before in the only other instance of Māori language being sung at an International Contest, when Musical Island Boys sang a Māori verse during “Now Is The Hour” in the years they spent competing in the quartet contest (and including in their winning finals set in 2014). The concession made here is to accommodate American audiences, who likely do not have experience with Māori language. The musical device of live translation is visceral but contributes to ongoing questions of appropriateness and delivery of this indigenous material in barbershop contexts.

Vocal FX, with moments like the above verse from “Pokarekare Ana”, challenges norms of barbershop singing in global contexts through the pride with which it handles indigeneity. While there are some unresolved issues regarding processes of cross-cultural mediation and engagement, the ensemble provides a safe zone for singers outside of Māori and Pacific Island contexts to learn and engage with performance traditions from singers from these contexts. I argue that the way in which Vocal FX approaches learning and performing this repertoire is the start of working towards a model of respectful engagement with indigenous music and dance in barbershop contexts.

Is this reflective of New Zealand barbershop more generally?

While Vocal FX opens a conversation around modelling respectful multicultural engagement and open community in barbershop music, it does not serve as an indicator or representative of what barbershop looks, sounds, or acts like in the wider New Zealand context. Outside of the Wellington hub, many New Zealand groups have a distinctly older demographic, many of whom fall into the white Pākehā 45+ year old category. While these groups present wonderful contexts for men (and women) to get together and enjoy each other's company in a musical and social sense, my view is still that I represent an outsider positionality within the national context. If anything, barbershop in New Zealand still feels a lingering influence from the barbershop of old in North America, although I suspect the political leaning is generally less conservative. I have had varying degrees of interaction with choruses outside of the Wellington bubble, most notably over the course of 2019. As mentioned earlier, the secondary school program accounts for the highest degree of diverse representation, but the post-school New Zealand barbershop scene suffers from the steep drop-off in singers continuing on with barbershop. It is not a stretch to suggest that Wellington is incredibly fortunate to have the strongest base of high school singers, and that Vocal FX presents a youthful chorus for them to transition into (even while still in school, in some cases). Elsewhere in New Zealand, I have had many conversations in recent times (including at the Christchurch convention and on my coaching trip to Timaru) about how choruses with a higher median age struggle to attract younger singers to their chorus. In many cases, singers from these demographics appear to attribute their lower scores to this very phenomenon. If camaraderie is the focus for these ensembles, then barbershop in New Zealand seems in good stead, as the values inscribed by the Barbershop Harmony Society seem to be upheld. Couple that with the new inclusivity policies being passed both locally and internationally, and the community is in a positive position. If competition, or at least bettering the quality of singing in choruses in New Zealand, is the focus, then it might be a different story. For barbershop to be sustainable in New Zealand, it will require a culture shift towards promoting and incorporating youth singers and more contemporary repertoire or diverse musical influences. While we see these changes taking place in North America, they appear to move slowly to New Zealand (perhaps a byproduct of diasporic flow).

Conclusion

It does not have to be a slow crawl to a culture shift, however, and Vocal FX is an example as to why and how. This chapter has engaged with how singers arrive at barbershop music and how (or why) they are hooked into this style of singing. Furthermore, I have considered the role of indigeneity in Vocal FX, and how cross-cultural mediation can lead to unique opportunities for singers from seemingly disparate cultural contexts to learn and engage with cultures outside of their own in a respectful, safe, and artistic zone. In 2020, this will manifest in a competitive sense as Vocal FX performs at the Barbershop Harmony Society's International Chorus Competition. One could predict that this performance is likely to shake things up in the American barbershop hub and show people how barbershop music can be transformed through diasporic flow and artistic bravery.

Chapter 3: “Vincent”: Emotion in barbershop singing

In this chapter, I explain how Vocal FX operates as a model, and safe zone, for male emotional expression – both musically and extra-musically. Specifically, I show how barbershop singers interact with emotion in their performance, and how this feature of this musical style encourages singers to discuss, consider or conceptualise their feelings in a safe space. In my experience, this is an admirable model for healthy and honest discourse about men’s mental health, as exemplified through many of the fieldwork and lived experiences throughout this chapter.

One of these lived experiences occurred in early 2016. I had just arrived at a Vocal FX rehearsal when I received some difficult news. My father had called me to let me know that my grandfather (his father) had passed away that day after a battle with cancer. Prior to this, I had experienced a fortunate run of health throughout my extended family – this being the first death within my immediate close family - so this news came as a massive shock. I walked into Tawa College and expressed to Jeff and Charlotte (Vocal FX Directors) that I might be somewhat off-colour during the rehearsal as I had just learned of my grandfather’s passing. They expressed the utmost warmth and empathy for my situation and told me to take any time I needed or to join in singing with the chorus if that would be better. I chose the latter option and proceeded to sing my way through the next two hours – music tends to help me through difficult emotional situations. I did not mention anything about it to anyone other than my friends who I had driven into rehearsal with, so I went through the rehearsal emotionally incognito.

The most memorable facet of this experience was what happened at the conclusion of the rehearsal. One of Vocal FX’s most poignant traditions is to “circle up” at special moments – every singer joins arms with the singer next to them in a big circle in the middle of the rehearsal room, often leading to a member of the chorus saying a prayer or sentimental speech. The religious side of things with Vocal FX is somewhat understated – it is not a prominent facet of the chorus experience, but there is a definite presence of religiosity within the chorus. Religion is never forced on members, even in moments when key members turn to prayer to bring everyone together. The assistant director of the chorus – the spiritual centre of the group, and the member of the ensemble with the most mana – said a long prayer

for me and my family in our time of grief. I felt an overwhelming sense of comfort, and I recall bursting into tears at that moment. I am not traditionally the type of person to let myself grieve in front of people (or even cry at all in front of people), nor am I particularly spiritually inclined but, in that moment, it felt right. It was OK to express how I felt in whatever way was appropriate to me at that time. Following the “circle”, many singers from the chorus came up and expressed their condolences and offered any help they could at that point. Members who were absent sent messages of support via social media over the following days, and another member of the directorship team offered to attend the funeral. I was 20 years old at the time, and I had not had much experience dealing with grief at all, be that in my own life or through friends. To immediately be accepted into a group of men and allowed to go through a new set of emotions, all the while being consoled by people in a similar age/gender demographic who have gone through the same things themselves, was an influential moment in my life. In a sense, Vocal FX taught me that it is OK to express myself, and to let my emotions out in a safe, welcoming place. Because the ensemble frequently places emotive performance at the epicentre of the creative process, singers share a subconscious understanding that the men around them have traversed similar emotional states, and that it is perfectly fine (and, in fact, encouraged) to share this with each other and our audiences. Frankly, I do not know if there was a better place for me to have been when receiving this news. This introductory anecdote, combined with the discussions of belonging and self-expression that preface it earlier in this thesis, showcase an openness and supportiveness within Vocal FX barbershop chorus.

The chapter is in three sections. Firstly, I consider methodologies and frameworks for my exploration of emotional expression in this context. In doing so, I lean on existing academic literature around singing and emotion, as well as the processes of conducting ethnography in a home-like context and traversing complicated emotional terrain during interviews and other conversations. Secondly, I analyse a pivotal song from Vocal FX’s competitive repertoire – David Wright’s arrangement of Don McLean’s 1971 song “Vincent”. The chorus has performed this in two competitions, including at the 2018 Barbershop Harmony Society International Convention in Orlando, Florida, and at the 2019 Barbershop Harmony New Zealand National Convention in Christchurch (which fell during my ethnographic research period). I analyse key features of the song and arrangement, and then discuss how Vocal FX navigated this emotionally dense song from the perspective of performativity and

embodiment. Finally, I consider many of the conversations I had with members of the chorus during my fieldwork process. Virtually all of my interviews organically arrived at discussing “Vincent” – a song which struck a chord with many members of the chorus.

Literature and Theory

As in the prior chapter based around Vocal FX and multiculturalism, this chapter utilises findings from my fieldwork period spent with the chorus during 2019. I draw on interviews and observational notes from rehearsals and, especially so in this chapter, from the contest experience. I say “experience” as the actual competing part of the Christchurch convention in this instance is less interesting than conversations and artistic experiences that directly preceded the contest performance on-stage – I develop this later in the chapter. As I stated in my introduction, the openness exhibited by my interviewees (and myself too, for that matter) would likely have been a rarer occurrence without having years of common experiences and/or close friendships with these people. Additionally, I recall my own memories of singing in Vocal FX (as in the introduction to this chapter) to inform how I conceptualise the relationship between singing and emotional expression in this chapter. I recognise that memory-based writing is an inherently flawed style of writing, as nostalgia and selective memory favour positive or prominent moments, and many of the mundane yet intriguing facets of the ethnographic process are lost through writing through recollection, given the inherent bias of this process. In saying this, my memories of learning how to sing emotively are pivotal to my understanding of Vocal FX and wider barbershop singing in general. These memories also served as the impetus for writing this thesis, so I include them where appropriate.

Much of this chapter is grounded in a consideration of how vocalists or vocal ensembles conceptualise emotion and/or visceral expression in their performances. Coutinho, Scherer and Dibben (2019) theorize emotional expression in their chapter “Singing and Emotion”, where the authors extensively discuss the idea of the “emotional script” in singing (Coutinho et al. 2019, 300). This “emotional script” emanates from the “text of the libretto (or the lyrics) and annotations” and “binds their performance to the way that the piece is presented emotionally by the composer and writer.” (300-301) The authors note that, in some genres, the “emotional script” is absent or not thought of as intently in other genres. In my music-

making history, I had not considered the projection of emotion in the voice to a massive degree before and found this to be an integral part of the creative process for Vocal FX. In barbershop music, there are not always explicit notes in the sheet music to suggest particular emotions. Rather, the style of music is predicated on digging into the hidden messages of the lyric, melodic patterns and associations that stem from particular chords and cadences to construct how a singer should perform such music. I discuss these ideas more in a later section of this chapter, where I analyse David Wright's arrangement of Don McLean's "Vincent".

This emotive, embodied style of performing and/or emotional expression in barbershop music stems from the judging system, which I mentioned in Chapter 1 of this paper. In this instance, defining the Performance category in barbershop music is integral to understanding why ensembles like Vocal FX conceptualise emotion in their creative process in the way that they do. As per the Category Description in the Contest & Judging Handbook (2018), the Performance judge "evaluates entertainment within the barbershop style" (Barbershop Harmony Society and Society Contest and Judging Committee 2018, 6-1). Furthermore, the section of the Contest & Judging Handbook devoted to the Performance category begins with a short paragraph called "The Art of Performance", which reads as follows:

"One significant goal of any art form is communication. A barbershop performance refers to how the artist communicates a message and vision via the transformation of a song into an entertaining experience for an audience. The performance of a song is the artist's gift to the audience, whose experiences, memories, and imagination transform that gift into an emotional experience." (6-1)

There are two parties in this performative context – the artist and the audience, and that these two parties share in a relationship of sorts during the transmission of art. The role of the artist (in this case, the chorus ensemble) is to find the message of a given piece of music and transform the song from text and notes on a page to a visceral, expressive performance for an audience, communicating the message to them. The audience then transplants their lived experience and feelings onto said performance, thus creating an emotional experience at both ends of this artist-audience relationship. Later in the description of the Performance category, there is a section titled "From the heart and believable" places genuine humanness at the heart of the way performing is conceptualised in barbershop music. The description states that "the entertainment value is higher for performances that are perceived by the

audience to be from the heart. These performances are characterized by effective mood creation through the performers' visual involvement and vocal expressiveness" (6-2). This description outlines the two tools most commonly utilised in terms of crafting a performance in the barbershop style – the visual performance, and the expression utilised in the voice.

In my experience, the way in which barbershop music fulfils the first of these tools is through considering who the artist is singing to at any given point of a song. This is particularly prominent in Vocal FX, as Charlotte will map out who singers are singing to for every line of a song. This lines up with Frith's idea that the singer is simultaneously:

- performing him or herself, and is therefore personally expressive
- performing a star persona
- performing a song character (Frith 1996, as quoted in Coutinho et al. 2019)

This trichotomy of simultaneous persona is generally not uncommon for barbershoppers to think through in their performance and is incredibly common at the more elite competitive end of the barbershop spectrum – both in quartets and choruses. In Vocal FX, our director Charlotte will suggest we sing to one of three places/people: to ourselves, to a person, or to the world. This aligns with the first of Frith's distinctions, as barbershop music is predicated on personal, heartfelt expression. It is merely who this expression is positioned towards that alters over the course of a song, and the singer is personally expressive in that direction accordingly.

In a song like "Vincent", Vocal FX were encouraged to figure out what it meant to each singer to sing within themselves, directly to someone they were thinking of, and to "the world", as in clearly outwards in a potentially abstract, thoughtful way. The ensemble was provided with an annotated version of the sheet music to the song (see Figure 6), which included various trigger words to emphasise the sub-text of the song, and colours to suggest where the performer should be concentrating their emotional expression.

VINCENT

Words and Music
by DON McLEAN

(Starry, Starry Night)

Art. by DAVID WRIGHT 18/11/17
for VOCAL FX

VERSE 1

freely 1 2 3 4

Tenor Lead: Full of wonder Star-ry, star-ry night, Amazing paint your pa-lette blue and grey. Thankful Look out on a

Bari Bass: Thankful sum-mer's day with eyes that know the dark-ness in my soul. Sha-dows on the hills, Mystery doo doo

5 6 7 8

Beautiful life doo doo doo doo Feel life

9 10 11 12 13 14 15

do sketch the trees and daf-fo-dils, doo doo doo catch the breeze and

win-ter chills in rit. land, all pain-ted by his hand.

Feel life Diamonds on fresh snow Ancient wisdom Understand Pain/Joy

win-ter chills in co-lours on the snow-y li-nen land, all pain-ted by his hand. Now I un-der

Figure 6: annotated excerpt from "Vincent", words and music by Don McLean, arranged by David Wright for Vocal FX, annotated by Charlotte Murray, 2019.

This provided each performer with a blueprint (or "emotional plan", as Charlotte would suggest) as to what they should be thinking about and embodying while singing each part of the song. Some techniques to achieve this in a physical sense included finding a collective focal point for addressing a person, opening up from the standard curved shape of the ensemble on the risers to promote individualised expressions within the larger chorus whole

on the risers (this would include changing up the angles that members were standing at, instead of merely looking at the director), and small physical gestures which accented the humanness of how singers expressed the lyric. That might include small hand movements, more physical animation when expressing anger, or less animation when expressing something delicate. “Vincent” necessitates a variety of emotional gestures when performing in the barbershop style, and as such provides a great case study for considering emotional embodiment in barbershop.

“Vincent”

Analysis

Don McLean’s “Vincent” (also known as “Starry Starry Night”) was released in 1971 on McLean’s acclaimed *American Pie*, and later was released as the second single from the record (following the title track). The song is well-known to many as a tribute to Vincent van Gogh, and a commentary on mental health. When the Music Leadership team were considering songs that we could have arranged for the chorus to sing at the Barbershop Harmony Society International Convention in 2018, Charlotte suggested this song as our ballad. David Wright arranged the song for the ensemble and, immediately upon singing it, the chorus resonated strongly with the song – from both a musical and thematic perspective. Musically, the song follows a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge form, however the Wright arrangement concludes the song a full verse and chorus shorter than McLean’s version (for lyrical reasons I explain shortly).

As far as barbershop theory is concerned, the arrangement features a “preponderance of dominant-7th type chords” as per Averill’s description, and cycles through the circle of fifths. Furthermore, Wright’s “Vincent” includes a supertonic diminished 7th chord as the climactic moment of the arrangement – a common device in lyrical ballads in the barbershop style, due to its dissonance and close harmony (especially from the friction created by the major-2nd interval between the lead and baritone voices in the diminished chords in Bar 57).

The musical score for "Vincent" is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 50-54) begins with a *mp* dynamic and a *slower p* marking. The lyrics are: "And per-haps they nev-er will. For they could not love you. Still your love was true." The second system (bars 55-58) starts with a *freely* marking and a *ff* dynamic, followed by a *pp* *expressively* marking. The lyrics are: "And when no hope was left in sight on that star-ry, star-ry night you took your life as lov-ers of-ten". The score is written for a lead voice and three supporting parts, with the lead voice carrying the melody and the supporting parts providing polyphonic backing.

Figure 7: excerpt from "Vincent", words and music by Don McLean, arranged by David Wright for Vocal FX, 2019

The arrangement does contain some contemporary elements, with the prime example of this being the prominent major-7th chord that acts as the penultimate chord in the climax of the song ("on that starry, starry ni-ight..." at Bar 57), as well as the lead-and-trio texture that features throughout the second half of each verse section (e.g. the lead voice sings the melody, while the remaining three parts act as polyphonic backing instruments in a support role). These are particularly contemporary arranging devices – the major 7th chord was previously discouraged by arranging/Music judges and has only begun appearing in barbershop contest arrangements during recent times, while the polyphonic section departs from traditional homophony, and allows the lead voice freedom to sing and "sell" a lyric in a more free way. This is particularly prevalent in quartet singing, in arrangements like Signature's "Proud Mary" and After Hours' "The Next Ten Minutes", where choosing to have a lead solo can give texture change from the homorhythmic singing that typifies the barbershop style, and allow the lead singer an additional way to express themselves as the emotional centre of the performance. "Vincent", then, utilises the lead-and-trio texture directly after two densely homorhythmic parts of the song. Firstly, the introduction to the arrangement unfurls from unison into four parts, establishing the melodic theme of the song. Following this, the second half of the verse is largely in lead-and-trio. The second occurrence of this pattern is in the second verse, where there is another unfurling from unison into four parts, this time climbing into high tessitura in the lead voice and a louder dynamic across all four parts. This is contrasted by the lead-and-trio texture that follows in the second half of

the verse, returning to the intimate lead melody as supported by instrument-like backing from the remaining three voice parts.

Singer-songwriter and folk musics are often predicated or judged on the quality of their storytelling, and “Vincent” features a heartbreaking and evocative set of lyrics. McLean makes use of artistic metaphor and direct addressing of Vincent van Gogh throughout the song, as if celebrating his life and creative gifts, while also mourning the loss of van Gogh’s life through directly addressing the artist. There is a synergy between the lyrical material, melody, and the harmonic structures emanating from McLean’s original song and from Wright’s barbershop arrangement. Some of this leads to considering the connotations of particular sounds or chords for listeners (especially if one were to continue to explore the artist-audience relationship I mentioned earlier). From a theory perspective, David Huron’s book *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (2006) delves into this idea and considers what various intervals (and/or scale degrees) project in terms of emotive descriptors. Huron conducted a survey asking “ten experienced Western-enculturated musicians to describe the different scale degrees for the major key.” (Huron 2006, 144) It is worth noting the demographic from which these musicians come, as they are all trained musicians in a Western sense, and therefore many of these ideas are culturally constituted (or second-nature based on training in a Western musical system). Furthermore, Huron’s study doesn’t play the intervals between the tonic and the chosen scale degree concurrently, but sequentially. This provides indirect reference to how barbershoppers conceptualise harmonic intervals, and a study of simultaneously played intervals could be more directly applicable. A variation of Huron’s study was carried out by YouTuber, composer, and bassist Adam Neely in a video entitled “Can you guess the interval by its emotion?” (2019), in which he asked a fellow music YouTuber to respond to emotional responses and match them to what scale degree Neely was describing. I include this here as Neely’s non-scientific survey acts as conducting the same survey as Huron’s scientific one, but from the opposite starting point. A tonic is described as “stable” or “home”, while a dominant scale degree can be “strong, muscular, pleasant” (145). Of particular note is the raised subdominant, which when analysed as part of a dyad with the tonic becomes the tritone. Huron’s sample responses to the raised subdominant include phrases like “moderately anxious”, “transitory” and “somewhat curious about possibilities”. The tritone is evidently an uncomfortable interval

that suggests tension, and is an integral part of barbershop theory, given the styles predilection for diminished and half-diminished chords in climactic parts of ballads. Furthermore, the tritone is featured in every dominant-7th chord (between the mediant and the subtonic), so the feeling of tension and resolution is implicit in the majority of chords sung in this style. The combination of the dissonant chord voicing with the anguished lyrics at the climactic point of the song points to how lyrics and chords have a symbiotic relationship in barbershop music. In contrast to harmonic tension supporting lyrics of anguish at the song's climax, the verses feature aforementioned lead-and-three-voices structure, giving a simplicity and beauty to the sound and supporting the lyrical content which is celebrating van Gogh's unique worldview.

Performing "Vincent"

Once Vocal FX learns a piece of music (that is, to get away from note-reading/learning parts), the ensemble pivots towards a heavy focus on artistic interpretation, musicality, and performance. Given Charlotte's position as a certified Performance Judge within the Barbershop Harmony Society, Vocal FX tends to use Performance as a key tool as they craft competitive performances. Furthermore, the nature of attempting to perform a song like "Vincent" in a way that is honest and expressive requires certain focuses on lyric, embodiment, and vocal expression in order to be able to do the song justice. In this section, I discuss how Vocal FX went through this process during the run-up to the International Convention in Orlando in 2018, and moreso in the run-up to the New Zealand National Convention in Christchurch in 2019.

As stated earlier, one of the ways in which the chorus traversed the challenging lyrical terrain of "Vincent" is through considering who they were singing to. Perhaps the greatest thread throughout the ensemble's performances of this song is the idea of "finding your Vincent", as in finding a person who you know (or knew) who embodies the beauty and challenges that van Gogh went through, so as to find a more personal link with the abstract lyric. Margaret Medlyn, in her book *Embodying Voice: Singing Verdi, Singing Wagner* (2018), discusses this idea in light of conceptualising emotional connection:

Dramatic subtext, how and why events happened, is separate to the emotional subtext that adds its own distinct aspect to a role: I often request students to write an emotional map of their character's journey. There are various methods for drawing an

emotional map and enhancing an emotional connection, and all rely on the activation of the singer's imagination: the singer's relationship to the role, the connection to other characters, the connection to the audience. (Medlyn 2018, 29)

Vocal FX conceptualises their "relationship to the role" in the same way. While the broad subtext exists for everyone, it is up to the individual singer to find the target of their storytelling. The idea, then, is that the combined urgency and intimate quality emanating from 50 singers approaching a song in a very specific, personal way can create a level of emotional connection with the audience beyond a standard performance.

In both the Orlando and Christchurch campaigns, Charlotte and guest expert David McEachern (a Canadian Performance judge) crafted different ways in which members of the chorus could experiment with projecting certain emotions visually, as well as finding ways to get these men into situations where they considered deeper feelings they would not normally interact with artistically. Many of my interviewees suggest McEachern was the catalyst in getting Vocal FX to perform with more humanness, and as such his name appears frequently throughout the rest of this chapter.

I have two distinct memories which informed how I sang "Vincent" in each of these campaigns, and I think they reflect how many members of the chorus grappled with a different artistic conceptualisation process to that of other musics they had engaged with. One of Vocal FX's major traditions is a weekend retreat to a marae – in recent times, this has been Whakarongotai marae in Waikanae, an hour's drive north from Wellington. These retreats, especially in International Convention years, will host a visiting expert – usually McEachern. One of the exercises McEachern conducted with the chorus in 2018 was to get all of the singers off of their standard positions on the risers, and to stand on the floor of the room we were rehearsing in. He then suggested that, without talking, we all walk around the room in a somewhat random fashion. When we made eye contact with another member of the chorus, we were to stop and maintain that eye contact for ten seconds, before moving on to another member. We were not allowed to laugh, speak, or react in any way, rather we were encouraged to maintain a neutral expression and concentrate on staring into the eyes of the singer we were interacting with at that point. One of my interviewees spoke about this exercise and said the following:

I felt very exposed. I don't think I often just look at people straight on, so that tapped into a different part... I think that's interesting in terms of male masculinity, it's not very common for another man to look at a man just face on. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

In that conversation, we acknowledged that it was healthy to explore breaking down masculinity and to connect with other people in this way, particularly within the demographic Vocal FX represents:

You're stripping away these misconceptions of what male masculinity is... this rugby culture and traditional values of what a man is, he wears gumboots and drinks at the pub, I think we've moved away from that. I just found it fascinating that there's this group of fifty guys who are just so willing to jump in... I feel like I'm in a safe environment where I'm not going to be judged. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

The overarching idea behind this exercise was to promote emotional vulnerability, and it seemed to contribute to creating an openness within the group to be sensitive when handling the lyrical material of "Vincent". The exercise cemented how safe it was in that space, with those singers, to let yourself feel and convey emotions that you ordinarily wouldn't talk about or think about. The catalyst, then, in this exercise is embodiment and physicality. Embodiment is key to providing the platform for these discussions, and physical gesture can provide support to the mental, sub-textual conceptualisation that prefaces the singing of a song like "Vincent". In *Icelandic Men and Me: Sagas of Singing, Self and Everyday Life* (2013), Robert Faulkner paraphrases the work of Jane Davidson, noting that "non-expert listeners rely heavily on visual clues, observing bodies to make judgements about the expressive qualities of a musical performance" (Faulkner 2013, 89). Faulkner suggests "the body is clearly involved in a wide range of illustrative functions", which is true of barbershop performance. This is evident in a range of performance styles, be that balladry with very intentional movements at particular moments of a song (eg. opening the body up front on in moments of emotional intimacy or openness), or in more complex up-tunes, where elaborate dance choreography has become a critical part of elite chorus performance⁶. The body provides a conduit for the

⁶ See Westminster Chorus' "From Now On/Come Alive (Medley)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwUkiPUqVyM>) from 2019, or Vocal FX's "Funk Medley" from 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrdE15auxlQ>) for examples of this.

mental and emotive conceptualisation behind barbershop singing. In these heavily choreographed performances (both balladry and up-tunes), the amount of singers actually taking part in the flashy dancing or at the forefront of the visual narrative in a ballad is few, so the role of the remaining singers on stage is to support that. In a sense, the performers have to develop what Medlyn would call “kinaesthetic awareness”, which is not necessarily natural to all singers. Medlyn writes:

Physical gesture is one of the main markers of acting style. Certain singers [...] have an entirely instinctive reaction to space, while others – singers, for example, whose arms habitually ‘windmill’ or who have trouble interacting with props – need to work to control their body, to develop a sense of their body, that is, a kinaesthetic awareness. (Medlyn 2018, 27)

Singers are then suggested simple movements (often by Charlotte, Jeff, or a member of the performance team) that support or contribute to the visual narrative often taking place on the floor in front of the risers. Sometimes these movements can be as simple as standing totally still, while at other times simple choreographed movements are used to draw the audience’s eye to the focal point of the visual narrative (often associated with dancers or actors downstage).

An even more poignant moment than that of McEachern’s exercise came while Vocal FX was going through a warm-up session on the morning of their performance at the Barbershop Harmony New Zealand National Convention. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this was less so a directly competitive sing-out than an obligation to get a score, given that the chorus was required to stand down for a year having won the BHNZ Chorus Contest in 2018, but still needed a qualifying score to be able to go to the BHS International Convention in Los Angeles in 2020. At the conclusion of our physical and vocal warm-ups – a process which included singing through “Vincent” and our up-tune, “Love Me Or Leave Me”, a number of times to clean up starts and ends of each song – Charlotte took a moment to address the chorus. We sat around the room in the backpackers where we had been staying, and Charlotte took a moment to tell everyone about who her “Vincent” was. She mentioned a family member who had gone through some tough times, and also discussed a work colleague who had suddenly passed away, leaving behind a young family. At the conclusion of her emotional anecdote, Charlotte opened the floor for other members of the chorus to speak openly about who their

“Vincent” was, and who their motivation was for their emotive individual expression while performing the song. One member discussed the late rapper Mac Miller, another discussed a family member fighting the darkest depths of mental illness, while multiple members of the chorus talked about friends who had passed away after battling depression, and openly wondered what they could have done to help. The overall message was to reach out for help, and to keep an eye on people around you who are struggling. The feeling in the room was sobering, as the people who spoke up ranged from leaders within the chorus through to young, newer members of the ensemble who would not normally have the opportunity to address the chorus. This was highly sensitive information and an incredibly delicate moment to navigate – I did not feel obliged to speak myself, but I know that I could have if I had wanted to. Furthermore, several members of the chorus have training in mental health counselling and/or education, and one member expressed that handling the sensitive information we had all received in this moment was something that should be done with respect and caution. I hope I have done so in this context. It was a startling display of emotional vulnerability that transcended music, and pointed to the fact that this group of 40-50 men felt comfortable with expressing difficult emotional thoughts in conversation with a reasonably large group of people – something which I had never experienced before as a 23-year old man. The platform for this open discussion emanates from the shared traversing of complex emotional territory in an embodied sense through singing together, and there is a surety that comes from working through that with other men.

Emotional control in barbershop singing

In both the Orlando and Christchurch campaigns, “Vincent” pushed Vocal FX’s singers to their emotional brink, with a number of men often ending up in tears while singing (particularly in the climax and conclusion of the song). As discussed earlier in the thesis, scholars discussing barbershop have often fixated on the complications of traditional masculinity and barbershop singing in a somewhat dated way. This occurs again when considering the idea of men becoming so caught up in the emotion of a song that they begin to cry or shudder in the voice. Nash, in “Ring the Chord: Sentimentality and Nostalgia among Male Singers”, discusses this idea at length when considering the idea of performance, specifically saying that “the songs become a kind of safe conduit through which emotions may be expressed without identifying ties to an individual singer” (Nash 2012, 595). I struggle with Nash’s next set of claims,

however, where even though he admits that he had seen men cry and had cried himself while singing songs, he suggests that “crying must be controlled and suppressed in order to perform a song and carry out a rehearsal or a performance” (595). Nash further states that “a balance between elicited emotions and control of them is the goal of an accomplished singer”. While this might be the goal, I do not know how realistic it is as a blanket statement – especially when considering barbershop music. Coutinho et al. (2019) discuss an example of an Adele live performance as one where the singer crosses over into being “visibly overtaken by emotions”. On this idea (and particularly concerning operatic singers), they write:

Interviews with professional opera singers show the tremendous concern of artists to find the right compromise between abandonment to emotional involvement in the service of the role and the control of physiological symptoms required for the proper technique. Singers’ physiologically determined emotional states are certainly a powerful factor in determining a large number of vocal characteristics and, in some cases, may be necessary to operationalize affective intentions. (Coutinho et al. 2019, 302)

I quote this at length because of the spectrum suggested by these scholars. On one end is technical control, while on the other is total loss of emotional control. The consensus appears to suggest a tendency to favour the former of these approaches – although a singer might be performing a role, they are to be grounded in technique and not let their emotions get the better of them.

Barbershop singing disrupts this idea, given the idea of being personally expressive when performing, and the value placed on the artist-audience relationship through performance (both generally, and competitively given the 33% value that the Performance category holds in barbershop judging). For example, it is particularly common in barbershop music for there to be a dramatic build up to a dissonant chord sung at high tessitura (like in “Vincent”), and for there to be a silence (a dramatic pause) after singing it. During that silence, singers often grapple with tense emotional states and have to compose themselves before singing the next line. While occasionally parodied in barbershop circles⁷, the diminished chord-and-dramatic-pause is a hugely common feature of barbershop arranging and performing. In the case of “Vincent”, the climax comes before delivering the line saying, of Vincent, that “you took your

⁷ See Clutch’s “Mic Test Medley” from 2019 for a parody of “cheesy dramatic” moments - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkTGgap6KmQ>.

life as lovers often do”. Many singers, throughout rehearsals and performances, were near tears while delivering this line. I recall one particular rehearsal in Orlando where the chorus sang the song in its entirety and there was a prolonged silent period upon finishing the song. Many singers broke down in tears, while others hugged and embraced the men around them. In this setting, the singers’ loss of emotional control added a viscerality to the performance of the song that aided the expressiveness and humanness of the entertainment.

The most prominent example of this phenomenon occurred in a contest environment during a performance by quartet Signature in 2017, during the International Quartet Contest in Las Vegas. The quartet was performing a Theo Hicks arrangement of Luther Vandross’s song “Dance with My Father” – a soulful, emotionally charged set of lyrics about missing a lost father. When the quartet reached the emotional climax of the song (“to dance with my father again”), the lead singer, Daniel Cochran, stopped and broke down in tears on stage during the song. The three singers around him stopped and turned to him to console him, before regrouping some 30 seconds later and continuing the song. Instead of this lowering the entertainment value of the performance, due to loss of technical control (as Nash might have it), this performance was received rapturously, even as Cochran’s voice trembled for the rest of the performance. There was a prolonged standing ovation as the quartet hugged at the end of the song, and the Performance category scored the song at an average of 97/100, with the quartet receiving an average score of 95.6/100 across the three categories. This performance (and response) demonstrates that this ensemble’s display of humanness strengthened the link between artist and audience, and therefore was rewarded in a critical sense by the judges of the competition. Even as I go back to the YouTube clip of this performance now, I am still moved by the group’s delivery (especially the vulnerability in Cochran’s storytelling), which points to a timeless emotional resonance generated by the performance. “Dance with My Father” presents an example of a performance wherein visceral emotional display enhances the singer’s performance, rather than diminishing it.

Richard Mook, in his article “White Masculinity in Barbershop Quartet Singing” (2007), appropriately writes “the demand that barbershoppers perform ‘with feeling’ sometimes served as a liberating force, allowing men to perform heartfelt emotions that might otherwise remain mute within a hegemonic mode of masculinity” (Mook 2007, 473). This “liberating force” seems to extend or challenge ideas of traditional masculinity, as choral music (or even

singing more broadly) could be considered feminine in nature. Sarah J. Powell's article "Masculinity and choral singing: An Australian perspective" (2015) digs into specific ideas around defining masculinity and considers its complicated link to choral music. Powell writes that "masculinity is a socially constructed concept... it is associated with activities and stereotypes that exude power, aggression, competition, strength and macho attributes. It is usually described in terms of what it is not and this generally equates to anything feminine" (Powell 2015, 233-234). Powell also quotes Talbot (2010), who argued that "from an early age, boys 'must distinguish their own identity as masculine from the identity of their female parent' and 'prove their masculinity'" (234). In that sense, Powell notes that choral singing "presents a problem for boys", given the feminine quality it possesses. There is an undeniable stigma that exists around male participation in artistic endeavours, particularly in the younger age demographic who act as research subjects in Powell's work. Powell discusses this problem in more detail, writing that "the alleged femininity of singing is based on characteristics that display emotion and softness, expression and a sharing of the "self". These attributes are incongruent with accepted, dominant masculine qualities." (235) Barbershop music, and the participation and demographic base of Vocal FX contrasts and challenges this idea. All of the criteria listed by Powell relating to the "alleged femininity of singing" are commonplace in barbershop and are especially exemplified through the aforementioned exercises in performance conceptualisation and sub-textual influence in barbershop songs. The lack of stigma in Vocal FX around portraying these allegedly feminine qualities, in tandem with a different sort of embodied masculinity, leaves me optimistic about the state of "traditional" masculinity.

Further contributing to my optimism around changing modes of masculinity, I want to highlight the conversations I shared with a number of Vocal FX's singers in the final section of this chapter. These conversations display the opportunities implicit in barbershop singing to express oneself in a way that challenges both expectations of traditional masculinity and technical singing are liberating ones for its singers.

Conversations

In this section, I suggest some general, common threads that occurred in these conversations when considering the topics of self-expression and emotion in barbershop. Following this, I

draw on two specific conversations to exemplify the breadth and variety of responses to thinking through these concepts. My fieldwork involved sitting down with ten members of Vocal FX and discussing their experiences of singing. Many of these conversations reached points of discussing barbershop as a vehicle for self-expression, and virtually all of the interviews ended up at a discussion of “Vincent”. I quote some of the more poignant moments from these discussions below, as a means of tapping into what it means to a number of singers to have the opportunity to dig into this lyric in an emotionally challenging way, and how rewarding that process is for them through barbershop singing.

As a preface to this material, it has struck me throughout this research how unique these conversations are. There was a big picture moment that occurred during my fieldwork in which I realised I was somewhat unintentionally curating a series of conversations where I, a 23-year old man, sat across a coffee table or office desk from another man in his 20s or 30s, and we talked about our feelings. These types of conversations are, in my experience, rather uncommon in that there was no emotional filter whatsoever. Both parties felt inclined to share things with the other person that would not ordinarily pop up in day-to-day conversation. Much like the open forum “Vincent” conversation I mentioned earlier, I suggest that these conversations were able to occur in the way that they did because of a shared understanding and experience of traversing complicated emotional terrain in artistic endeavours.

In my interview process, building on the discussions I mentioned in Chapter 2 of this paper, I began by discussing the singer’s beginnings with music, choral music and barbershop singing. I then asked them about their experience with Vocal FX, and finally we discussed repertoire. At some point, either when discussing the chorus or the material the chorus sings, the interviewee would either bring up (or be prompted by myself) to discuss emotional embodiment and physical performance. This prompted an array of responses, including from a couple of members who admitted that this style of performing was somewhat outside their comfort zone, and was markedly different from other modes of classical or contemporary music they were accustomed to working in. Most conversations delved into how singers specifically grapple with the barbershop ballad, with particular attention paid to “Vincent”. Some said they struggled with emotional embodiment until something clicked, while others

found the personal expressiveness easier to identify with. An example of one of those responses is from a singer with a theatrical background:

I could embrace it because part of theatre and acting is to relay a message. Not just through dialogue or acting, but through the music... You want to emotionally connect the song, and also you're playing a character rather than being yourself. I think there was a significant divide between "She's Out of My Life" and "Vincent". "Vincent", I felt, got real deep into the emotional part. It was also asking a lot of each individual to bring something, and I felt that caused a bit of vulnerability. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

A striking facet of many of these conversations was the use of evocative, emotive language throughout conversations. People were not shy about telling stories about complicated times in their lives (some of these I discuss below), or about diving into metaphor in explaining how they feel about things. I was taken aback by the willingness of these men to tell stories and open up – they were unique conversations to me in that respect.

I want to draw from a couple of interviews particularly here to give a sense as to how different singers, from different backgrounds and approaches, interact with emotional expression in Vocal FX. The first interviewee here is a long-standing member of the chorus and is one of the pivotal figures in incorporating indigenous culture into Vocal FX's repertoire and performance. He noted the importance of David McEachern on the group, in terms of re-conceptualising what it means to express emotion in performance, and cited a particular time when the chorus was performing Michael Jackson's "She's Out of My Life" in the lead up to the International Contest in Nashville in 2016:

One of the songs we did was "She's Out of My Life", we went overseas and did it, and came back and held onto it. I was able to connect to it when me and my ex-partner broke up, that was quite an emotionally rough time for me. The first time I sang that after that break-up was when we went up to Masterton, that was probably one time I was able to connect with real emotion and produce it. One of my mates in the audience said, 'I was watching you and you were in it', and I could feel that I was trying to connect with that and produce it on stage. When he said that it was positive feedback, so I thought that what I've got to do when I'm singing songs is I've got to find something I can connect with and produce it out. From a mental health perspective, this whole emotional expression part of barbershop allows you to process emotions that potentially could have just sat there and seeped through other ways... bad ways, you could end up doing silly stuff if you don't process it properly. That's where barbershop comes in as a good emotional processor. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 9/9/19)

Another long-standing member of the chorus shared an anecdote after we discussed singing “Vincent”, which he described as one of the deepest and most difficult songs to perform, particularly in rehearsal contexts when you have to work through that emotional space repeatedly. He discussed how music can emotionally resonate with him:

Especially after having McEachern on board, he puts you in different places emotionally to deliver a song. We didn’t have that back in the day, but since he’s come on board there’s so much more to it... the emotional side and how you can make other people feel. I remember we sung “Ave Maria” seven/eight years ago, and my mate had passed away, he’d committed suicide, but he’d taught us “Ave Maria” in the last year of high school. It’s not just the music, but memories of particular songs that remind you of people, or if you’re going through a tough spot and you sing a song, it’s a hard thing to do but it’s enjoyable too because it makes you feel... (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 6/9/19)

The influence of McEachern’s performance ideologies on Vocal FX’s singers cannot be understated, and it seems as if it represents somewhat of a shift in approach from how Vocal FX had considered performance prior to 2016 (when McEachern first came on board). This singer poses the idea of music being associative, be that with people or memories or a time. This anecdote, like the prior anecdote about “She’s Out of My Life”, displays a direct connection between repertoire and a distinct subtextual influence. Both of these singers found a person in their lives who, through their lived experience, aligns with the text of the respective songs. Given the way in which Vocal FX approaches performance, this allows these singers to create a more human performance, strengthening the bond between artist and audience.

The final interviewee who I wish to discuss here is a younger member of the chorus, having joined Vocal FX while still attending high school in Wellington. As such, this singer has had an opportunity to grow up (or work through many of their formative years as a young adult) within the context of Vocal FX. His initial biggest barbershop influences come from extended family who had sung barbershop, and from singing in quartets at school. Vocal FX represented another level of quality singing than what school had presented, with reference paid to forming relationships and considering emotions in performance for the first time. In particular, the Orlando campaign in 2018 strongly resonated with this singer – both in terms of the trip and the competition itself, as well as the lead-up to the event:

Rehearsal is seven minutes away from where I live, I see these guys every week, it's special. Other moments as well when you have those deep connections with other people, I feel like Orlando brought those moments out and made them frequent. There's just so many moments throughout that trip where you could really feel the connection. It was unspoken, it was just there. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

He suggested that his experience of Orlando was directly tied to the repertoire for that contest, including "Vincent" – a song that had deeply affected him:

It's just so poignant... the song just resonates with everyone in the chorus so deeply. It's just a fact of life, turbulence is going to occur, loss is going to occur, pain is going to occur... it was just a place for you to channel that. Coming to Orlando was a big step for me you know, a couple years ago, I was pretty sick. I was depressed, and being able to take that hindsight... and put that into a collective good [feels great]. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

We reminisced on how we had both experienced some difficult times in the lead up to Orlando, as we had both suffered injuries/illness of a similar nature. We discussed how being able to come to rehearsal on a Monday night and sing a song like "Vincent" was therapeutic in a way, as we were able to let out any frustration or sadness we were navigating in our everyday lives through the medium of barbershop music. Speaking about this, my interviewee suggested that Vocal FX was "a very masculine group in a sense, but at the same time, it's a different kind of masculinity. It's a place where we're allowed to be vulnerable... the amount of times everyone's cried singing "Vincent" ..." This was a common mantra throughout many (if not all) of the conversations I had during my research, as singers were quick to point out that there was a distinct masculinity to Vocal FX, albeit a different and more unconventional version wherein emotional expression was heavily encouraged and welcomed. This singer also picked up on the meta moment we were involved in during our conversation:

This kind of talk that we're having, where we can talk so deeply... I strive for that in my everyday life. Of course, there's surface conversation, but this is a moment in between where you're able to talk deeply and share deeply. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

I made a number of observations during this conversation. Firstly, this singer was in touch with his emotions, and could freely express himself when discussing relationships, depression,

and the artist-audience connection through personal expressiveness. Furthermore, this singer had clearly developed into young adulthood with a strong influence from the men in Vocal FX. He said that:

I can definitely see if a young male was without a father figure how poignant Vocal FX would be. I'm lucky enough to have one of those in my life, but it's just multiplied in Vocal FX. I have so many strong mentors to look to for guidance. (Interview with Vocal FX singer, Wellington, 7/8/19)

I often reflect on how Vocal FX has changed my outlook on music-making, artistic endeavours, and general everyday life, but I was particularly taken aback by the open and honest communication being expressed by this singer. Vocal FX, regardless of its musical output, poses a strong model for how men can operate emotionally, outside of traditional modes of masculinity. The musical output merely opens doors for singers to learn these skills of emotional expression, both as artists and as people in everyday life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which emotional expression exists and is navigated in barbershop singing. Vocal FX has developed into a model environment for men to learn how to express themselves, and to do so in a safe space, through the ways in which elite barbershop choruses work to fulfil the challenges of the Performance category description and create strong links between artist and audience. This research challenges some existing barbershop scholarship regarding the balance between technical prowess and visceral emotional expression, while extending other scholarship promoting the liberating qualities of diving into a song and learning about what it means to each individual singer in a chorus or quartet. Moreover, the experience of singing "Vincent" was a poignant one for Vocal FX and illustrates how these conceptual approaches to barbershop singing can open up modes of emotional expression for men to discover and engage with – musically or otherwise.

Conclusion

“He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.”

(What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.)

- Māori proverb/whakataukī

This research re-affirms my belief that, for barbershoppers, participating in this style of singing is a way of life, and a way to develop and maintain lasting relationships with like-minded singers. A discussion point that arose in some of my interviews was whether it mattered that we were singing barbershop at all. Rather, many of the singers I spoke to admitted they came back to barbershop for the people, the friendships, and to feel as if they belong to a community of expressive, empathetic, and open performers.

This thesis contributes to the existing conversations around the links between singers and emotion, masculinity, community, belonging and politics. Vocal FX provides a case study of an inclusive, diverse and ambitious ensemble who push the envelope in their bid to alter a style of singing on a global scale. Chapter 1 outlined a history of barbershop music (and barbershop and quartet singing in New Zealand), while I also engaged with the politics of exclusion in barbershop music over the course of the last 80 years. Chapter 2 included an ethnographic case study of Vocal FX chorus, and outlined some of the ways in which indigeneity and barbershop collide in that ensemble’s repertoire. I also discuss member’s motivations for singing barbershop with Vocal FX during that chapter. Finally, Chapter 3 engages with ideas of embodiment, emotional conceptualisation and self-expression, tethered to performances of Don McLean’s “Vincent”, as arranged by David Wright for Vocal FX.

While much of my discussion is celebratory of diversity and multiculturalism, I am under no illusions that Vocal FX may be a somewhat anomalous case study. Everyone in Harmony, as I discussed in Chapter 1, does represent an attempt at a culture shift for Barbershop Harmony Society and its members. Analysing the push for diversity from New Zealand, and through that point of view, displays how change can move much quicker in smaller contexts. I made a case in Chapter 1 that I believed the Everyone in Harmony initiative to not be

entirely fulfilling its purpose based on its current progress and trajectory. This is largely based on the contest re-structure that falls short of absolute inclusivity – seemingly the goal of such an initiative. In Chapter 2, I posed how opening up channels of expression and diversifying membership can lead to unique moments of cultural exchange and performance that can alter barbershop music, and take this style of singing a long way away from the songs of the Tin Pan Alley that often typify the style.

The first chapter of this thesis also exposed some of the dated scholarship that exists within barbershop contexts, and some of the problematic viewpoints and/or perspectives expressed by scholars or historical barbershoppers which contribute to any delays or ineffective attempts at diversification that the Barbershop Harmony Society might currently be experiencing. The content in Chapters 2 and 3, based around Vocal FX, illuminated how barbershop music (and perhaps choral music more broadly) need not be stuck in a particular point in time (politically, socially, or musically). Rather, barbershop music can, and should, evolve and become multiplex based on diasporic flow and new voices approaching the musical style. There is a place for preservationists in music, and part of what makes barbershop so special is tethered to upholding tradition, but I encourage barbershoppers to think forward, and be progressive and brave with music and inclusivity. As Chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis display, barbershop music can provide a catalyst for singers to experience new cultures in a respectful way, learn how to express themselves emotionally through song (or conversation), and contribute to cathartic and genuine artistic expression in strengthening the link between artist and audience. The more diverse barbershop gets (in every sense, not just the physical singing), the more exciting the artistic product will become globally.

If nothing else, I hope that this work communicates the extra-musical value of singing for non-professional singers everywhere. Without coming across as too celebratory, these singing contexts can be life-affirming and heart-warming for those who become involved in them – be that as a singer or a spectator. Some of the people I spoke to in my ethnographic fieldwork suggested that barbershop music can be the outlet to get people out of dark places, and that's worth exploring, documenting, and celebrating – especially when the musical style is so niche as it is in this case. This research matters for the same reasons that Vocal FX matters – it questions the norms and celebrates diversity and emotional freedom in the pursuit of artistic excellence.

Glossary

This glossary draws from existing work by Averill, and Richardson and Markley, in tandem with the terminology I have picked up in an emic sense throughout my research and wider experience of barbershop.

Afterglow – “The informal party that follows a barbershop performance” (Averill 205). I would add that this sort of event can happen at educational conventions, and non-formal barbershop events as well.

Association of International Champions (AIC) – Effectively the canon of elite barbershop quartets. When a quartet wins the BHS International Contest, they are inducted into the Association of International Champions, and retired from competition in that four-person configuration. The AIC hold a show once yearly during the BHS International Contest week, where retired gold-medal quartets perform new arrangements or old favourites from contest years gone by.

Ballad – A lyrical type of contest song, usually a vehicle for a dramatic, storytelling style performance. **Ballads** have historically been drawn from musical theatre repertoire (which provides singers – lead singers especially – with a dramatic story to tell the audience), and more recently from popular music contexts. Vocal FX’s performance of Don McLean’s “Vincent” draws from the singer-songwriter genre, for example.

Barbershop harmony – “... four-part, a cappella, consonant, close-harmony singing with the voices typically in TTBB (tenor, lead, baritone and bass), and featuring a flexible tempo, a preponderance of dominant seventh-type chords, ringing harmonics, characteristic arranging devices (swipes, tags, etc) and a commitment to the popular songs of an earlier period in American history (1890-1930)” (Averill)

Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) - Formerly known as SPEBSQSA (The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America) – although that’s still the legal name – the Barbershop Harmony Society (or BHS) are the leading force in barbershop music. It is BHS’s International Contests that elevate the elite ensembles into the canon, and their judges and educators that ...

BHS International Contest(s) – The contests held once yearly in early July for elite ensembles from around the world.

Barbershop seventh chord – “A chord consisting of the root, third, fifth, and flatted seventh degrees of the scale” (205). Largely known as a dominant-seventh chord in music theory contexts, this chord is so prominent in barbershop contexts that singers have informally renamed it in their setting.

Barbershopper – someone who can identify as an insider in barbershop settings. They sing themselves (although there is no requirement for ability, anyone can be a barbershopper as long as they can hold a part), and partake in singing in either a chorus, quartet, or in social settings, and attend conventions or other barbershop events.

Blend – The meshing of voices across a quartet or chorus. This often goes hand-in-hand with **balance**, which pertains to the relative volume of notes sung by each part in a four-part chord, so as to best engineer overtones from the sung chord. An ensemble that balances chords well and has a natural blend is often a great one in barbershop contexts.

“Cultural set” – Whenever Vocal FX attends an International Contest, they sing in an additional event called the **World Harmony Jamboree**, which highlights acts from outside North America who are encouraged to share something from their country with the audience. Vocal FX calls their performance at this event their **“cultural set”**, as the repertoire often draws from Māori or Pacific culture.

Embellishment – “A word barbershoppers use for any arranging effect, technique, or device that enlivens the texture of the harmony, e.g. swipe, modulation...” (207). A **tiddly**, for example, is a small solo-esque feature in an arrangement. The **Music category**, in particular, rewards the artistic treatment of embellishments in barbershop performances.

Everyone in Harmony (EIH) – An inclusivity initiative launched by Barbershop Harmony Society in 2017, aimed at diversifying barbershop membership. A result of this is the integration of women’s and mixed ensembles into BHS contests, as well as new outreach to African-American communities.

Gang-sing & Mass-Sing – Like the scene from *American Harmony* discussed in Chapter 1, a **gang-sing** is a sing-through of a known song by singers at a barbershop event (it may be an

entire crowd in an auditorium, or a group of singers at an afterglow). A **mass-sing** is a formally organised sing through, usually held as part of a convention where “everyone in attendance is invited to gather in a public place to sing barbershop harmony” (208)

Judging categories – Barbershop contests under the BHS umbrella are judged equally in three categories – **Music**, **Singing**, and **Performance**. Detailed descriptions of each of these categories are outlined in Chapter 1, and these categories are capitalised throughout the thesis to avoid confusion with the terms music, singing or performance.

Overtone – Averill writes that “In acoustics, an overtone is one of the frequencies that sound above a fundamental frequency.” A properly balanced barbershop chord should entertain the overtone series, and elite quartets and choruses can tune chords in certain ways to engineer particular overtones.

Pillar chord – A strong chord (often a tonic or dominant chord featuring a 7th) that is more conducive to “ringing” and to facilitating expanded sound. These are often sung on important lyrics in a song, or at important junctures over the course of the song musically.

Polecat – A standard barbershop song, often from the early 20th-century (or even earlier in some cases). **Polecats** (made up of “pole” from the barberpole, and “cat” as an abbreviation of catalogue) are shared repertoire that every barbershopper knows (or at least knows a handful of them), and are either learned aurally at conventions or events, or are the first set of sheet music provided to new members (in Barbershop Harmony Society contexts).

Ringling chord – “A chord in which the various partials or overtones present in the voices produce audible overtones and thus a peculiar ringing sensation”, as per Averill’s description. The pursuit of “locking” and “ringing” a chord is fundamental to the barbershop experience, and these are some of the most prevalent terms used in both formal and informal settings.

Show-tunes – Non-contest repertoire sung by an ensemble. In contemporary contexts, this often draws from contemporary acapella arranging styles or, for groups like Vocal FX, from local or indigenous musics.

Tag – “A special ending or coda to a song”, as per Averill. He continues by saying “Tags are extremely popular platforms for arranging skills”, and I would extend that by saying that knowledge of tags (and the ability to teach them) places a singer at the heart of insider

barbershop culture, while the willingness to partake in singing tags gives a singer a taste of the richest parts of barbershop harmony. The tag-singing culture provides an impetus to meet new people, produce ringing chords, and learn about harmonic movements and the roles of each voice part in barbershop harmony.

Up-tune – An upbeat type of contest song, usually a vehicle for jovial, physical performance.

Up-tunes have historically been drawn from jazz standards and musical theatre repertoire, but more recently have included songs from the popular music canon (even including an interpolation of Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk”, in Vocal FX’s 2016 “Funk Medley”).

Woodshed – The process of singing a song in the barbershop style purely by ear, without having seen sheet music, based on one’s inherent knowledge of voice parts and harmonic progressions in the barbershop style. It is a highly improvisatory pursuit and can apply to either tag-singing or full songs (for the brave). Averill writes that “the ability to do this is considered the mark of an experienced and serious barbershopper” (210).

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