

# The Burlingtone



The Voice of the Green Mountain Chorus of the Barbershop Harmony Society since 1947

We meet Tuesdays at 7:00 PM at St. Francis Xavier School, Winooski, Vermont-Call 879-3105

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## HIGH VOLTAGE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS!!!!



08/2000 to date

Tenor - Charlie Church; Lead - Bruce Spector; Baritone - Greg Morrill; Bass - Don Pierce

Yes, that good-looking quartet, **HV**, has been entertaining folks throughout New England and elsewhere for 20 years!! As the following historical record indicates, the quartet has made the necessary changes to keep it viable...not an easy thing these days. When the average age of a quartet is more like 20 months, this quartet has put together 20 years; yes, 2 decades of sound barbershop and fun. As ambassadors for our great hobby, they have no equal, as they have pursued our hobby with dedication and hard work, but have not forgotten that you have to enjoy what you are doing to continue it for this length of time.

Read on to find out what it takes to continue a tradition in this Special Edition of the *Burlingtone*.

## HIGH VOLTAGE TURNS TWENTY

Here's the scene - Saturday afternoon, October 26, 1985 on the down escalator of Le Palais des Congress de Montreal at the conclusion of the District Chorus contest. Electrical contractor Don Pierce turned to Adam Socinski, Greg Morrill, & Charlie Church and said: "I've got just the right name for our new quartet - '**High Voltage**'". Thus was born the "electrifying" quartet that is still charging up audiences today.

The quartet actually started forming during the summer of 1985 but had to wait to get going until Charlie finished his tenure with "**The Hometown Crowd**" at that same Montreal convention. The formation of the quartet is an interesting story in itself. Auditions took place on the porch of Charlie's camp on Colchester Point. The audition committee consisted of wives Alice Kruidenier and Sue Church, sipping on gin and tonics. Don Pierce was the only Bass there. Sound rigged already? Actually there was some competition as Adam Socinski, Tom Schersten, and George Walker vied for the fourth position and it wasn't at all clear who would end up singing what part. Greg ended up on Lead, Adam on Tenor, and Charlie on Bari.

**High Voltage's** (hereafter referred to as **HV**) first public performance was on March 1, 1986 at the Afterglow of the Champlain Echoes' Annual Show. The infamous "bumble bee" outfit was worn. Their first contest was the Division 1 quartet contest held on March 22, 1986 in Plattsburgh, NY. They finished in first place and went on to finish in 10<sup>th</sup> place in the District Contest in Lake Placid that Fall. Contest completion has been one of **HV's** major interests over the years - they have felt that preparing and singing in competition forces the quartet to continually focus on singing and performing better. Other early contest highlights were finishing sixth in the 1987 District Contest in Worcester, sixth in the 1988 Prelims in fifth in the 1988 District Contest in Albany, NY, and winning Division contests again in 1988 and 1993.

**HV's** first ten years were marked with singing and lots of fun. The quartet took top prizes in talent contests in Woodbury and Northfield, They sang all over the State from Peacham to Basin Harbor to Barre to Berlin to Colchester to Middlebury to Charlotte to Stowe to Jeffersonville, to Hyde Park to Milton to Montpelier to St. Albans to Shelburne to Wilmington - you name it, they've been there!

**HV** has traveled afar as well - to Harmony College in St. Joseph's, MO in 1987, to many NED Prelim contests (who can forget the **Harvey Walbangers** in New London, CT), to ladies' chapter shows and conventions in Montreal (both Harmony Inc. & Sweet Ads), Barre, North Attleboro, and Bolton. **HV** is fond of saying that 4000 ladies can't be wrong! And because they sang a lot and earned many bucks, they were able to travel to many International conventions. At the 1989 San Francisco convention, **HV** rang some wild chords inside the old stone walled Alcatraz prison. The quartet scrapbook has two great shots from the 1992 convention in New Orleans - standing under a "Lucky Pierre" sign (ask Denis Brochu to tell you that classic joke) and a picture with the **Chordettes**. **HV** represented the State of Vermont at the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, MA in 1993.

So many *songs*, WOW!, say it again, so many *songs* have passed over their vocal folds. The **HV** repertoire in 1995 listed 4 contest songs, 22 general songs, 12 comedy songs, 9 chorus songs, 12 holiday songs, and 35 songs they had learned and retired. Two songs have been in the repertoire for practically the whole twenty years - the opener, "*Hi Voltage (Neighbor)*" and the closer "*Please, Mr. Columbus*". Not far behind is "*Java Jive*". And *jokes* - the 1995 joke list shows 38 jokes and 30 one liners. The quartet is fond of saying, "we know a good joke when we steal it". Unfortunately many people have heard us tell them all, more than once. And lastly, so many *uniforms* - the closet can't hold them all!

Because of many audience requests, in 1993 **HV** decided to make a recording and thus their cassette tape. Wow! What a lot of work that was - from deciding what songs and jokes to include, endless rehearsals, to finding a competent sound engineer & recording studio, and then to the seemingly endless recording session, to discovering who all the copyright holders were and compensating them, paying the royalties, etc. etc. The initial order was for 300 cassettes, 300 more were reordered about three years later as the tapes were big sellers at the Middlebury Inn and Golden Eagle Resort in Stowe, our main stay income sources at the time. The tapes are collector's items now!

HV celebrated its first ten years with a gala party at Burlington Knights of Columbus Hall on February 21, 1996. One hundred twenty-five folks showed up to party with them; cards, letters and good wishes abounded. The Champlain Echoes catered. Arch competitor "**The Management**" quartet from Maine was hired to entertain - they did a whale of a job. Chapter and ladies' quartets sang; the GMC sang "*Please, Mr. Columbus*" to **HV** in retribution! The celebration sparked the creation of a quartet scrap book and photo album, which is still being updated today.

**HV's** second decade was marked by more singing, more fun, and many contests; but it was also marked more by change. "Love conquers all" they say and at the end of 1996 Adam announced his resignation from the quartet. Adam's place in the Tenor slot was taken by Chuck Laufer. Previously when Adam was unavailable, Chuck had sung with **HV** in a Lyric Theatre production of "*The Music Man*". So it was an easy decision to ask Chuck to join. In the summer of 1997, the Bryan Memorial Gallery in Jeffersonville advertised on the Internet for a quartet to help them celebrate a major anniversary. Among the bidders were **Acoustix**, past International champs from Dallas, and **HV**. **HV** was able to beat out **Acoustix** and won the bid! Not too many quartets can say that. It might have had something to do with the prices quoted. :-)

**HV** had some highlights while singing with Chuck. In 1997 the quartet sang for an assemblage of deaf folks. **HV** put together a booklet with the words for the songs and jokes; a signer was then used to accompany **HV's** visual presentation. Kinda confusing until one figures out what sign language for applause is! Another highlight was singing in Plymouth, VT in the summer of 1998 at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the inauguration of Calvin Coolidge. The quartet was asked to learn one of Cal's campaign songs, "*Keep Cool With Coolidge*". Chuck worked with Tom Gentry to come with an arrangement and a good time was had by all at the celebration singing that song and many more repertoire tunes.

One of the hallmarks of **HV's** long tenure has been its dedication to performing, and to performing in support of Green Mountain Chorus activities. The year 1998 would be a classic example. Not including rehearsals, **HV** participated in forty events that year; they earned an average of \$247 per performance in twenty-three gigs but more importantly, participated in fifteen chorus shows and sing-outs. It has been a very rare occasion when **HV** has not participated in a GMC Package Show over the last twenty years.

The winter of 1999 brought another change in quartet personnel as Steve LaCombe took over the Tenor slot in March. In addition to learning all the repertoire, Steve took on the role of lead romanticist of the quartet. He found the black and white shoes quartet shoes, commonly know as "chick magnets". And a llama fell in love with Steve while **HV** sang at the Adams Farm in Wilmington on the Fourth July weekend in 2000. One of Steve's lasting contributions was setting up a **HV** website - a lot of time and effort went into that project. But over the years it has been a valuable tool in publicizing and contacting the quartet. Even after leaving **HV**, Steve retained his role as web master. You can check out the web site at: [www.harmonize.com/highvoltage](http://www.harmonize.com/highvoltage).

The summer of 2000 brought another personnel change as Steve left the area to take a job in Mechanicsville, VA. The quartet started to cast about to find a new Tenor or perhaps a new Bari. One day Don Pierce ran into Bruce Spector at the post office in Montpelier. Upon hearing the quartet's dilemma, Bruce immediately indicated he'd be most honored to sing with **HV**. Thus in August, 2000 Bruce joined the quartet as the Lead singer. Of course, this meant moving personnel around. Greg switched to Bari, a natural fit for his vocal range. Charlie bought tighter underwear and moved to Tenor, a voice part he had previously sung for eight years with "**The Hometown Crowd**".

The new singer and voice part changes meant a lot of work for three-quarters of the quartet. Many, many extra rehearsals were called to get up to speed on the repertoire for gigs previously booked for the Fall of 2000. The extra work paid off as an almost seamless conversion transpired. A new exciting sound was created with Bruce as Lead; unfortunately, the same old jokes were retained! Bruce's addition brought along other bonuses as he is well know for his impeccable attire. Thus **HV** sported a number of spiffy new looks over the past five years.

**HV** continued to pound away at the contest circuit as the belief continued that contest participation leads to much improved singing and performances. Dan Signor was brought on as the quartet's coach in 2004. And this move paid off. Bruce received many kudos for his fine singing. Who can forget the magic of **HV's** rendition of "*Tin Roof Blues*" in Lowell that year? The performance helped propel **HV** into the top ten for the first time since 1992. **HV** has also continued its tradition of singing in schools to promote the concept of singing being a life-long avocation. Getting boys / young men to sing is the focus. **HV's** scrapbook has some great hand drawn pictures of a school performance in Jeffersonville in 2002. However **HV** was not asked to perform again in the Colchester graded school system - something about a gun going off!

"*The Music Man*" has drawn the attention of **HV** as they supported the contention that one of barbershop's best all time PR vehicles is a good quartet participating in that classic Broadway show and Movie. Various members of **HV** participated in the Barre Players rendition in 1987, with Lyric Theatre in 1995, and the Stowe Theatre Guild this past summer. As many are aware, the long tedious rehearsal schedule can be a bummer. But it all pays off on-stage when the audience reacts. **HV** has also had the opportunity to do some neat octet singing with the fine ladies quartet, **Charisma**.

In summary, **HV** wishes to thank all those who have supported the quartet over the past twenty years. Your assistance has been invaluable. The following is the last paragraph of their PR blurb: "**High Voltage** looks forward to entertaining and 'charging up' audiences with their special brand of harmony in the barbershop style!". We hope we can continue to do this for a long time to come.

Below is a rogue's gallery of quartet personnel over the years:

10/1985 to 12/1996

Tenor - Adam Socinski, Lead - Greg Morrill; Baritone - Charlie Church; Bass - Don Pierce



01/1997 to 02/1999

Tenor - Chuck Laufer; Lead - Greg Morrill; Baritone - Charlie Church; Bass - Don Pierce



03/1999 to 07/2000

Tenor - Steve Lacombe; Lead - Greg Morrill; Baritone - Charlie Church; Bass - Don Pierce

