

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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www.chuckroots.com

Knights in Shining Armor

Well, not really. But I thought I might catch your attention with this title. However, the knights part is correct, whereas the shining armor part is up for debate.

The expression "knight in shining armor" has historically implied an upright, valorous and virtuous man who goes around rescuing maidens in distress. On a more intimate level, women often are looking for a husband who will be their "knight in shining armor".

This week's missive toys with this idea of knights, but I'm coming at it from an entirely different perspective.

As most of you who have been reading my column know, I enjoy singing. And one of my hobbies is singing Barbershop 4-Part Harmony. I'm a member in the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) which is an international organization specifically focused on this uniquely American music form we know as "Barbershop Music". The Society has grown to the point that Barbershop Music has spread throughout the world. Other countries that are currently singing barbershop are Great Britain, Holland, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific Islands, South Africa, and more! To see what I'm talking about, go on YouTube and type in Barbershop Chorus Champions. Then listen to your hearts delight. Do the same with Barbershop Quartet Champions. But be careful! This can be addictive.

I actually am a member of three barbershop choruses. I'm active with Voices of California (VoCal, for short, 75 men) out of Sacramento, and the Golden Valley Chorus (GVC, 25 men) in Modesto. The third chorus is the Alexandria Harmonizers in Washington, D.C. My nephew, Josh Roots, is active with this chorus which boasts 125 men.

Each year choruses and quartets compete at various events in their districts to move up the competition ladder. If they are good enough, they earn the right to compete on the grand stage at the annual International Convention. This year the convention is being held in Las Vegas at Bally's (July 4-9). The Voices of California (VoCal) will be heading for Vegas where we will compete against other big choruses, as well as the overall title of Gold Medal Chorus Champion for 2017. This will be my first time competing at an International.

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So, last Saturday VoCal had an extra rehearsal in preparation for our big opportunity in Vegas. We spent four hours going over the two songs we're required to perform, which includes a fair amount of choreography. We spent all four hours on our feet with only a ten-minute break. As you might surmise, we're committed to this event!

The theme of our performance package is Knights of the Round Table. A package typically has an "up tune", and a ballad. Our up tune is, "The EPIC Knight Medley", followed by the ballad, "If Ever I Would Leave You". The Medley is a spoof on Knights of the Round Table, harkening back to the swashbuckling days of the Middle Ages in England with King Arthur and his knights. The EPIC Knight Medley, using known tunes, uses entirely different wording in order to stay true to the Knights theme. And should you be concerned that there might be copyright violations, rest assured: We are diligent in acquiring the needed permission.

The parody on the tunes we use for our Medley are: "Knights of the Round Table." A classic line from this song is, "We dine while here in Camelot. We eat ham and jam and spam a lot!" We then bridge into the tune, "So Long Mother", only the wording is, "Oh, Guinevere a little tear is gleaming in your eye. Your knights are all assembled, off to war where we may die!" Then we roll into "Just in Time", only we sing, "It's jousting time. Hooray it's jousting time! Those pointy sticks are primed. Let's have a show!" The next tune is the classic "Chariots of Fire" followed by "I Could Have Danced All Night". We sing, "I could have lanced four knights, I could have lanced five knights and still have lanced some more!" Next up is the tune, "Bright Was The Night". It's changed to sound very much like the original, but instead, we sing, "This knight's not bright! His head's not right". And then we end the up tune with "I Love A Parade". But we sing, "Oh, I love a crusade!" One line in this part goes like this, "I love a crusade! The Bubonic plague, the loss of a leg or maybe a thumb, a Thumb! We're off on a crusade!"

Remember what I said earlier. This is a spoof, a lampooning of knights as they prepare to go off on crusades.

The ballad, "If Ever I Would Leave You", is sung straight, and is intended to illicit emotion as the character of the knight leaves his love behind while he rides off into an uncertain future.

All seventy-five of us are dressed in period costume. Originally, I was one of the townspeople, and my singing position was strictly on the risers. Last week I was informed that I would now be one of the soldiers which requires coming off the risers and doing a lot of foot and hand movements all performed on the stage along with other soldiers and knights.

I wish you could be in Vegas to see us perform. But one thing you can be certain of: I will be writing an article (or possibly two) about the experience. Isaura will be accompanying me, so we're going to have a blast!