

Toronto Northern Lights in competition

By Juanita Arnold, Ontario District webmaster

Murray Warne and Bernie Hachey arranged a fabulous breakfast at the historic *Union Station*. (Sorry if anyone else helped and I forgot your name.) The room was packed and the guys had to turn people away at the door. There were the members of the chorus, their families, members of the Ontario executive, *Ontario District* supporters, and the Harmonet's biggest *Northern Lights* fan "Bear In Oz" all the way from Australia.

After breakfast several speeches were made. Many of them related to the chorus' first song "Brother Can You Spare A Dime." I'm sure the legend of the Beggar's Club has been told before, but for those who do not know... in order to get the real feeling of what it would be like to not have ANY money members of the chorus went out on the streets of their home towns and begged for money. Some were successful. Some were not. But the experience helped shape the song and the character the guys wanted to portray.

Mark Thompson told the story of begging in Japan where begging just is not done. He was successful in getting money. He then had the funds changed into 60 one piece yen (I think) and gave one to each member of the chorus.

Chris Arnold made a speech about each of the new members of the chorus joining them on the International stage for the first time. He then asked all the guys in last year's chorus to remove their 5th place bronze medals from their shirts and put them in their pockets so the chorus would all be the same today.

The killer speech of the day came from **Steve Armstrong**. All week, members of the chorus had been reading letters or portraying roles as people from the depression to get the guys "to the edge." Steve told the story of a family that was pushed so far that they tried to commit suicide. I don't remember crying so much. I have no idea how the guys could sing that song after hearing that story.

After the Kleenex was passed around the guys headed back to the hotel to prepare and the rest of us headed to the competition. **Brianne** and I headed to the BarberTot room to watch the competition via closed circuit TV.

People were giving me a few strange looks when I was laughing or giving a little cheer to *Alexandria* and *Northbrook* for their song selections. Little **Cameron VanBuskirk** ran up to the TV when *Northbrook* was singing "There's Something About A Soldier" thinking it was his daddy doing his part of the Parody.

One chorus before the *Northern Lights*, I asked one of the ladies in the BarberTot room to bend the rules and watch Brianne for me so I could see the performance live. I ran into the auditorium and sat with **Lori** and **Joel Armstrong** and **Carol**

and **Gregory Mallett**. Watching a performance with two very excited 6-year-olds is great!

The crowd started to chant and clap and scream. We could see the guys getting on stage and were getting very frustrated that the announcer kept talking (and talking and talking and talking). The Canadian flags were all over the auditorium. Finally the lights dimmed and the curtain rose.

The guys were all in line for bread in long overcoats. **Steve Armstrong** received his bread and moved to the front. The chorus started in unison "They used to tell me . . ." and the audience was hooked. This song just tears at your heart strings. Steve Armstrong did an amazing job of arranging it. As they continued the tears began to run down my face.

When the basses hit the final extremely low E flat the crowd was in awe. The standing ovation started. The members of the *Vocal Majority* sitting in front of us turned and said "That was incredible." We told them "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

After a brief pause you could hear **Chris Arnold** yell "Okay Boys!" The overcoats were thrown off and an uplifting "Ba-doom, doom, doom" started. Many people recognized this as the start of "Sentimental Gentlemen From Georgia."

They were wrong... This was the start of "A Set Of Mental Gentlemen From Georgia!" It was the *Big Chicken*'s time to get theirs. The crowd went nuts when they figured it out.

The chorus did a number of "patented" big chicken moves including an arm stretch that the *Big Chicken* had just started in their package should receive extra marks. They then went on to imitate *Northbrook*'s soldier package, *Alexandria*'s dynamics, and the *Vocal Majority*'s *Jericho* package.

Some of the biggest laughs came from **John Mallett**'s excellent toy soldier imitation, the *Toys R Us* flag presented to him, the dramatic presentation of **Dave Campbell** as a member of *Alexandria* (turning his back to the audience), and the *Sugar Crisp Jericho* rendition.

The VM guys in front of us loved it and I have been told that *Vocal Majority* director **Jim Clancy** was almost falling off his chair he was laughing so hard.

At the end of the song, the crowd was on their feet even before the last chord ended. The guys accepted their applause while "clucking" around the stage. They were soon chased off by a giant chicken head poking over the chorus shell. All except John Mallett who fainted on stage.

There was nothing to do but wait and listen to the "buzz" of the crowd. The announcements were made.

5th place — *Great American Chorus*

4th place — *Ambassadors of Harmony*

3rd place — *Alexandria Harmonizers*

2nd place — **TORONTO NORTHERN LIGHTS**

