



NORTHWEST SOUND CREATES 'CARBERSHOP' CHORUS WITH DRIVE-IN REHEARSALS

During a time when chorus rehearsals were determined to be among the most dangerous public health activities, the Bellevue chapter of [Barbershop Harmony Society](#), including [Northwest Sound](#) and [Northwest Mix](#), rose to the occasion to keep the beat and morale alive.



Inspired by retrofitted practices across the country, Northwest Sound rallied its members to launch "Carbershop," a clever solution for gathering safely and comfortably amid COVID-19 restrictions. Picture a typical choir practice, but socially distanced - in a parking garage.

"We first heard about the idea from a chorus in Kansas City called Central Standard," Musical Director [Ken Potter](#) said. "They sort of developed the technique of syncing the microphones, hooking them up to a mixing board and transmitting awareness."

Every Wednesday evening on the southwest corner of the third floor Bellevue Collection parking garage, melodic voices can be heard drifting across Bellevue, landing on the ears of shoppers and passerby near Downtown Park.

On average, half of its regular crowd gathers for a rousing night of vocal exercises and rehearsal conducted by Ken, whose leadership and dedication to the craft are palpable in both the music and fellowship. On the docket are memorable earworms that range from iconic theater tunes like "Aquarius," to a popular track by the Plain White T's, "Rhythm of Love," and even an original composition that plugs Bellevue Square crooned as an old-fashioned radio jingle. Beneath the variety of genres and generations lies a universal appeal that Ken believes has always drawn the young, retired, novice and virtuoso alike together.

Singers are hooked up to wireless microphones (routinely sanitized by each member) that feed into a switchboard where audio can be adjusted, recorded and routed into a Zoom call for virtual attendees to participate - and also combat the echo-chamber acoustics in the space.

One seasoned member, Chris Powell, explained how during the early stages of the pandemic, choruses grappled with the seismic social shift and resorted to online conferencing and electronically-edited performances. And despite the advent of video-streaming services and other new devices, technical glitches and delays inevitably happened.

"Thankfully, The Bellevue Collection offered a section of its Bellevue Square parking garage for us to hold semiweekly drive-in rehearsals," Chris said.

Initially, singers were equipped with headphones and microphones inside their cars, strategically parked around Ken, who would stand in the center and project instructions through his own microphone. As vaccination rates steadily climb, some vocalists are more comfortable standing outside, but those who prefer to sing behind their steering wheel can still dial into a re-broadcasted audio feed, channeled from the electronic sound board to a micro-power FM radio frequency.



Even for a self-proclaimed "amateur chorus," Northwest Sound has enjoyed remarkable success with appearances at various competitive exhibitions around over globe, amassed 60 active members, and has been recognized as 20x district champions.

"At the last international competition, before the COVID struck, we finished 12th out of 800 contestants," Ken pointed out.

Bass section leader and former president [Bill Hickman](#) said that goosebumps are often the product of the magical synergy listeners sense in a quartet, when each tone aligns to form something transcendental.



"And that conglomerate sound creates something that we simply can't do on our own," Ken said. "And when it's just right, it's phenomenal, really."

May 21, 2021 - by Brooke Wilson

