



*International Medalist*  
**GREAT NORTHERN UNION**  
**CHORUS**



HILLTOP CHAPTER • SPEBSQSA

10,000 LAKES DIVISION - LAND O' LAKES DISTRICT

Vol. 8 - Issue #5

**GNU's NEWS**

July 2003

## Fun in Montreal



*Fun but disappointing 9<sup>th</sup> place finish for the GNU*

Once again, we did ourselves proud in performing a great package on the International stage. Seventeen years in a row is no small feat. Each guy was in top form. Complete with Derby hat and dapper suit with all the accessories, we sang and danced up a storm. What a good base for preparing for the eighteenth time next year!

Pete and the new music/performance team will soon present the plan for the new year and we will show the District that they will remain proud of us... and we will remain proud of ourselves as we forge to new heights. Bring 'em on!

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**The Director's Cut**

Have you ever been to a barbershop contest in which the outcome seemed exactly the way it should've been and everyone agreed with the judges' scores? If you have, then my guess is that your group was probably the winner of that contest and you were oblivious to everything else around you. Let's face it; no matter how a contest turns out, there are those who are happy and those who are unhappy at the end of the day. For many GNU'ers, including myself, I know that our Montreal placement was less than joyous.

While I think it is often productive to try and figure out why things didn't turn out as we hoped they would, it can also be a real guessing game. There are just so many factors that contribute to the final outcome that it's really impossible to know for sure. There is always



plenty of blame to go around because we are desperate to identify a reason. Since I have not had a chance to talk to many of you, or view the videotape, I have included some of my own conclusions of our International experience.

These things I **know** to be **true**:

1. The chorus was very focused and made tremendous strides during the final two weeks before the competition, especially in Montreal.
2. The chorus could have been more prepared in many ways leading up to that point.
3. Our rehearsals in Montreal were great and at times we were "in the zone."
4. The performance on stage was very good! It was not perfect, but it was very good.
5. We did not lay an egg on stage. We did what we were capable of doing at that moment.
6. Not everyone was totally comfortable with the choreography.
7. Not everyone who sang on stage met the note/word proficiency standard.
8. We cannot control performances of other choruses.
9. There were discrepancies in the judges' scores.
10. Many were disappointed in the results.
11. There are several different opinions about why it turned out that way.

Continued on page 3

## Director's Cut, Cont. from page 2

These things I **don't** know to be true or false:

1. It's was a disadvantage to sing 2<sup>nd</sup>
2. It was a disadvantage to sing after the incredible Greendale "package" performance.
3. Regarding the discrepancies, the highest scores were correct!
4. We got screwed.
5. Many guys should not have been on stage with us.
6. The uptune was too difficult.
7. We didn't execute "the plan"
8. Our new director is out to lunch. (Okay, I'm still waiting to hear this one)

I'm sure that each of you could probably add your own conclusions to my list, but I'm not sure it does us any good at this point. What I do know is that some of the greatest successes in history have resulted from "failures" that literally drove individuals to succeed. Maybe this is a wake up call to action. There is a lot to learn from this experience and I hope that all of our energy can now be put to good use as we make significant changes and look toward the future. So now we know what it feels like to finish ninth. How about if we find out what it feels like to win!

Sincerely,

PETE

## Coming Events



- ü August 19<sup>th</sup> - Como Park
- ü August 21<sup>st</sup> - Recording Session
- ü August 22<sup>nd</sup> - Twins Game
- ü Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> - United We Sing
- ü Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> - Rehearsal with Mark Hale
- ü Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> - Ladies Night & Awards
- ü Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> - Recording Session
- ü Oct 25<sup>th</sup> - Int'l Chorus Prelims
- ü Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> - Recording Session

## Presidents Corner

Where is the chapter at the end of this fiscal year?

What a year of recommitment to goals we have had, both from the music team and from the board! It is almost time to pass the administrative baton, and before we do that, please allow me to focus on a few of the accomplishments of the year.



I want to thank the nominating committee who gave me a board who was willing to go to work and begin this process which was planned to take several years. It was understood at the beginning of the year that it will take up to 5 years and that it will take the work of not only the board but also of a dedicated membership and of course of the talented music/performance team to bring us to another level.

The board this year consisted of the following: Steve Aldrich, John Babbs, Harvey Berwin, Kent Erlandson, Jim Higgins, Bill Lydecker, Roger Meyer, David Miller, Daryl Morteck, and Dan Vander Ploeg.

Following are thumbnail sketches of some of many stellar performances.

**Harvey Berwin**, who is experienced in the field of grants, has met his goals for the year and has volunteered to continue on this task. This is lucky for the chapter since this is a prime example of things which do not happen in a few months time. Grants, whether private or government sponsored, are pretty much given out on the timetable of the organization providing them. So we must be patient. Even so, he has already obtained over \$10,000 and has some more in the pipeline. Just getting the money for the new risers and rails is a huge and visible accomplishment! Harvey is our pioneer in this field and he is performing admirably. Thank you!



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**President's Corner Cont. from Page 3**

**Jim Higgins** has been an energetic and welcoming membership VP and for that we are very lucky to have him. Each of us is responsible, as we continue to grow, to find more talented performers for the future and to make all visitors feel welcome. The Membership VP is busy in a myriad of ways but this task is ours as well.



**John Babbs**, last year's President, was a quick learner for his new role as Treasurer. Having also held that position, I know that it is a detailed and necessary job for which there is little reward. John, you are appreciated.

There are a ton of other members who have done yeoman's work this year.

On the surface it may seem like it is unrelated to our

overall success, but how could we have gotten through our GNU life without the more than able VP of Chorus Management **Kent Erlandson**? While well over 20 members have done pivotal work this year, nowhere in the organization has there been anyone who has done so much for so little recognition. (Some of you have come close, by the way!)



**Darrell Morteck** stepped into a board position and has also given his video expertise to the effort. This has had a direct impact on our ability to critique ourselves and for that we are grateful.

There have been many non-board members without who this chapter



would not have operated efficiently. **Bob Cannella** is at the top of that list. He has not only once again managed tickets at both shows, but has performed behind the scenes in a variety of duties.



As I briefly indicated above, there are many other folks (board members or not) who have worked very hard to make us what we are. I think I speak for all when I say that we appreciate you. The music/performance leadership for sure deserves mention for a super job on their end. Although it could go without saying, let it be known that the chorus men all appreciate their efforts. No one takes you for granted, guys!

As we all know, there are many more who have taken care of what needed to be done. Forgive me for not citing every one. We are a group of artists. But if we don't continue to have dedicated administrators and organizers and guys who simply get the "work" done, then we have no efficiency and the main goals of performance suffer. So know that each gift of your personal and precious time is appreciated and valued by your fellow performers.

As we go forward to a new year with the right stuff for great things, please throw your support to the new administrative team and do everything you can do to make it a great year. I thank you for your support during my administration and I look forward to another GNU year of satisfaction and growth.

Roger Meyer, President, GNU

## Annual Awards Banquet

You are invited to attend the annual GNU banquet on September 13. 6pm. While official invitations will go out in a month or so, if you are on our bulletin mailing list, you qualify for attendance at our annual Ladies' Night Banquet. Attendees will include all current and former members and special friends, plus a guest for each. Please send your reservation request to Roger and Theresa at [roger.theresa@meyer.net](mailto:roger.theresa@meyer.net). or call 763-476-7382

The place is the lovely banquet area of Mystic Lake. Please enter through the hotel, not the casino.

A full evening of fellowship, good food, just a little singing, a program of awards including Barbershopper of the Year, and official Installation of officers is on the schedule.



The double ballroom in Montreal was filled to capacity for the annual LOL Pep Rally on Friday afternoon of International contest week. Nothing could make the District more proud than to "sponsor" two choruses and three quartets at this years International.. This years LOL quartet representatives were Excalibur, BreakPoint, and Bravo! What a demonstration of talent! The camaraderie and goodwill which has been developed between Greendale MVE and our men was evident at that event. The two choruses finished the afternoon with the singing of "America" in a massed chorus. What a nice feeling to have both choruses to share the International stage for several years in a row. Quartets clockwise from top: BreakPoint, Bravo!, Excalibur and Die WunderKinder (college quartet).





## The Gospel Sing

In a beautiful church in downtown Montreal, the Great Northern Union Chorus was honored to be the featured chorus for this year's International Gospel Sing. The house was packed and we were in good company with Society favorites, Happiness Emporium and Four Voices quartets. The "Happiness" members; Rod Johnson, Jim Foy, Bob Dowma and Rick Anderson delighted the audience with their lighthearted duties as MCs. They also blessed us with some wonderful singing.

Our own Pete Benson very capably taught and directed the audience in a song that he arranged. Additionally, we heard from Vocal Majority director Jim Clancy and International icon Joe Liles also helping the audience to appreciate and sing additional selections.

Suffice it to say that it was a special morning but we were all glad to get a breath of fresh air afterward since the church was not air-conditioned. But a beautiful building it was and we were appreciative of the chance to be there.



## Fom the Judges Pit

*The Great northern Union is very fortunate to count 9 judges and 2 candidate judges among our members. Through this column, we will get advice from these experts on how to improve our individual performance.*

### Breathe!

Jim Emery

In this article, I will continue the series on the Singing category with the first of several articles on vocal quality, one of the key things that Singing judges judge.

When speaking of vocal quality, every Singing judge lives by the three-part mantra of (1) well supported, (2) freely produced, and (3) resonant. If the sound of a quartet or chorus is well supported freely produced, and resonant, it will always be pleasing to the ear. At least if



it's in tune (see the last article!). In this article, I will deal with only part of the first of these three: well supported.

Support is also often called breath management. The reason is that it is mostly about breathing.

Obviously, breathing has two phases, inhaling and exhaling. Both phases are important for proper singing. Let's start with the inhaling first. I'll get to the exhale side, which is a bit harder to describe, in the next article.

The easiest way I know to demonstrate the correct way to inhale is to ask a singer to force every last bit of air out of his lungs and then just relax. The right thing happens almost every time! Because of a partial vacuum in the lungs, air finds its way in without any effort on the part of the singer. You don't have to suck air in to get a good breath. You just have to let it come in on its own.

For those who like a little more specific instruction, there are quite a few good visual pictures you can use for a proper inhale. Imagining the very beginning of a yawn is one. Smelling the sweet fragrance of a rose is another. Each of these will cause a natural opening in the back of the throat that allows maximum airflow into the lungs and relaxes the throat at the same time.

So, is that all there is to inhaling correctly? Pretty much, except that there are lots of potential barriers to letting the inhale happen naturally.

Posture is the most important. If you want to fill the lungs close to capacity, they have to have the space to expand fully. (You can't blow up a balloon while you're

sitting on it!) Several aspects of standing posture are critical to good inhales.

First, it is important that the chest be as high as possible while remaining relaxed. A mental image might be that you have a string attached to your sternum (breast bone) and the other end attached to the ceiling holding your chest up. Getting the chest high keeps the ribs from compressing the lungs. This allows the lungs to fill up all the way instead of just a little. Try taking a good breath with the chest high. Feel how good that feels? Now let your chest really sag and take another breath. See how little air you get? OK, you should be convinced. Now all you have to do is remember!

Another piece of posture that can get in the way for some singers is what I call a "swayback". Start out standing tall, and then stick your gut out while pulling your butt back and up at the same time. Now try to take a breath. Pretty hard, huh? The reason is that you've actually bent the lungs front to back, so they don't have the flexibility to expand naturally. An easy way to correct this is to rotate your pelvis down and forward just a little. This allows the lungs to expand in their normal upright position.

So, stand tall, keep your chest high, keep your pelvis under you, and start a yawn. Works every time!

There are a couple other bad habits that bear mentioning here just in case. I'm sure you don't do any of these, but maybe that guy next to you does.

One is called chest breathing. If you've ever done a lot of running, you know what this feels like. When you're really out of breath from athletic activity, your chest heaves up and down when you breathe. This chest breathing is very efficient at getting air into the lungs quickly, but it's not at all efficient for singing. So, make sure that your (high) chest stays put. There is no reason to lift the chest on each inhale.

Another habit is what I call "gasp breathing". Remember the relaxed open throat we talked about above? If you can consistently hear your inhales, or especially if the director can hear them out front, you're gasping rather than using that relaxed open throat breathing. This is often more common in uptunes when you need a quick breath. Go back and practice the yawn and then see if you can do the same kind of breath in the context of your songs. For a quick uptune breath, try a quick throat relax and just let the air come in by itself.

Finally, beware of tension. It will creep into little crannies of your body and wait for you. And just when you need a good breath, it will rear its little head and keep your breathing apparatus from doing what it needs to do. Find those little tension spots and relax them away.

OK, you got inhaling? Stay tuned in my next article for a discussion of the other half of breath management, singing on the exhale. Then we'll have the Singing judges' "well supported" down pat!



## Midwest Vocal Express – Wows!

The GNU were 2<sup>nd</sup> on stage at International following the Midwest Vocal Express from Greendale, Wisconsin. Steve Tremper, reporter for the Harmonet, gave this account of Greendale's 5<sup>th</sup> place medaling performance.

I suddenly noticed in the dim gloom of the darkened stage that a young boy was sitting on the floor in front of the closed curtain, obviously manipulating something on the floor in front of him. I couldn't make out what it was, it seemed like he was playing a board game or assembling something out of Lego's or K'nex parts. He went on like that for several minutes, and I could only assume that it was part of the setup for the first chorus, MIDWEST VOCAL EXPRESS, from Greendale, Wisconsin (LOL). Finally we saw him get up and take whatever it was he was playing with, and walk offstage...it looked to me like he was wearing pajamas. A moment later, Doran finally made the official announcement that the contest was underway, and introduced the MIDWEST VOCAL EXPRESS.

The curtain opened and we all gasped in amazement. The entire chorus was outfitted in "Green Army Man" uniform, exactly like the army of toy soldiers in the hit animated movie, "Toy Story." They were frozen in tableau, posed precisely in the positions that the normal small plastic green army guys are positioned, with bazookas, mine sweepers, guns, and other equipment. It was at that moment that I realized that the boy was playing with his green army guys! How cool! On either side of the chorus was a set of oversized alphabet blocks, about 3 feet on a side, two blocks on stage right and one block on | stage left. The chorus remained frozen in position until one soldier moved slightly, looked around, and called out in a high, clear tone, "All Clear!" Slowly, magically, the army came to life, and as they began to move I realized with surprise that their feet were also attached to a green slab of "plastic," exactly like the "Toy Story" soldiers! This caused them to have to awkwardly shuffle along the stage, the only way they could get around, and my first thought was, how on earth did they convince the guys on the risers that they wouldn't kill themselves with their feet attached like that! However, I don't recall seeing their feet anyway, so



*Midwest Vocal Express*

*Copyright PROBE 2003, David Wagner, photographer*

maybe it was just the front row on the floor. In any case, the effect was both funny and visually stunning. The soldiers sang a clever parody about how great it was to be a soldier in the "green army," claiming they "never lost a battle," and they do their best work "when no one is around." The precision execution was suddenly interrupted when the lookout hollered, "Here comes the kid!" and they all instantly froze back into position on stage. The boy in pajamas came out on stage, looked |

over his larger-than life-size collection of green army men, and with a satisfied shrug, ran off across the stage calling Mom for a late-night glass of water. After a few seconds the lookout again sounded the "All Clear!" and the song resumed, with mine sweeper dancers, and weapons on parade, an absolutely stunning visual treat. The audience screamed their approval, everyone giddy with pleasure at the great fun on stage.

They went into their second song, another parody, singing, "This is the Army, Private Green" and medleying with "Over

There". This parody explained that their "real" enemies out there were not soldiers of similar size and color, but the horrors of being in a toy world, subjected to evil kids, being strapped to firecrackers, attacked by giant hamsters, getting lost under the couch cushions, etc. In the midst of this, one soldier ran off behind the chorus riser shell and came back with a huge magnifying glass, which he positioned high overhead, aiming the sun's deadly rays on an unsuspecting green guy who was standing on top of the stage left alphabet block. All the action stopped as the army watched in helpless horror, as the sun's rays heated up the poor soldier, | causing steam to suddenly pour out from all over his body, as he began to melt, sinking slowly into the top of the block he was standing on, like the Witch in the Wizard of Oz...until there was nothing but his green army boots. The rest of his compatriots looked on in shock and let out a collective, "Woah!". A couple of soldiers moved forward and pulled out a white "Toys R Us" banner, laying it over the melted remains like an American Flag and carrying it ceremoniously offstage as the rest of the army saluted in respect. "It's Not Easy Being Green," they lamented, as they finished the song to a thunderous ovation from the audience. As the curtain closed, we all said, Oh, yeah! This is going to be SOME CONTEST!"



## Montreal Memories

**Strange but True** - My wife and I arrived several days before the convention started and a stranger on the street suggested a restaurant already being visited by Don & Mary Knecht. Two nights later, after making reservations at a place we thought looked interesting, the waiter showed us to a table right next to Don and



Mary AGAIN! Their B&B owner had recommended it to them. Lastly, it turns out that we both purchased convention tickets from a member of Friends and had seats a stone's throw apart for the whole contest. I don't know how big the city is, but for a while it seemed like a pretty small place. **Steve Hardy**

**What a rush!** Well, this was my FIRST International Stage and the view was AWESOME! I tell you that being on the stage with you guys made me feel on top of the WORLD! I plan to do everything I can to help the Chorus be there again in Louisville...Lewyville...Luievville... well, you know what I mean. **Don Russell**



*GNU on stage at Montreal*  
Copyright PROBE 2003, David Wagner, photographer

**Out on the town** - For the first time in the seven years we have gone to international competitions,. My wife, Bobby, went on Society tours, one around Montreal city including the old city area, and a second one which took her to the Biodome and botanical gardens. She thoroughly enjoyed both tours, met several interesting people, and got an opportunity to see the city -- something we as contest participants rarely get to do. She also got a chance to walk the underground beneath the Queen Elizabeth Hotel and the surrounding buildings (and do some shopping down there, of course). We both think that Montreal is the most interesting of the Society contest cities we have seen so far . **Harvey Berwin**



*GNU dress rehearsal before going on stage*

## More Montreal Memories

**Thank you** - "I'd like to thank everyone for their cooperation and understanding with all of the behind-the-scenes stuff that has to get done to make the competition a success! For example; All of Cleon's work with preparing the hotel reservations, John Kleiber hauling a boom box as he commuted from northern New York each day, Don Russell being the sole GNU rep to move risers on Wednesday, Dave Bowen patiently ensuring I was standing in the right spot for windows, the "Mystery Donors" for covering the cost of the motorcoach for the Gospel Sing (hope the check is in the mail!) and for all of the other things not mentioned here. Thank you all for pitching in when you did!! **Kent Erlandson** (Your friendly neighborhood Chorus Manager)

**Cruise'n with Power Play** - I knew there was at least a good probability that Power Play might win the quartet contest, so there was an added incentive to join the post-convention cruise from Quebec City hosted by Power Play. There were between 70 and 80 of us, so it was a good group. Power Play performed four times that we attended, plus a couple we missed. We had great weather five of six days.

GNU results were disappointing of course, but the whole trip was great in every other respect. Helga told me in great detail about what a great job Greendale did, so I am happy they got a medal. **Darrell Egertson**

**A 'trip' to remember** - All I remember is missing a step in the underground and the next thing I knew I was at the bottom of the stairs with blood running down my legs and hands. Nurse Sue took over and determined I had knocked the wind out of me and that we only had an hour before I was to be dressed and ready to sing on the International stage. At any rate, we returned to the hotel, cleaned up the mess and got ready to sing. Little did I know that two ribs were broken and that I would not sleep for about a week. No golf for five weeks and it is really a pain in the @@@@! I was too excited to feel pain until we came off the stage. **Bruce Gray**



*In keeping with the annual tradition of presenting the competing choruses with a token of good luck, a representative of last years chorus winner, Masters of Harmony, presented GNU president, Roger Meyer with a gold star, wishing us good luck in the chorus contest.*



*Excalibur on stage  
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## LOL International Contest Results

### Chorus

Midwest Vocal Express	5 <sup>TH</sup>
Great Northern Union	9 <sup>TH</sup>

### Quartet

Excalibur	7 <sup>TH</sup>
Breakpoint	30 <sup>TH</sup>
Bravo	39 <sup>TH</sup>

### Collegiate Quartet

Die Wunderkinder	18th
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## Remembering "Em"

We remember with fondness, our beloved Emery Nelson who unexpectedly passed away earlier this month.

We will truly miss his kindness, his smiling face and his deep commitment for both our chapter and his hometown St. Croix Valley chapter.

He loved to write (rather eloquently) when he cared deeply about things. Most recently we were all enriched by his account of traveling home from Montreal with his wife Dorie, and Kevin Lynch's mother.

Our hearts are with Dorie and the family as they begin adjustments without "Em". We all have stories about him and he will be missed.

Here are some of the thoughts shared via email following Emery's death.

"He was kind, compassionate, thoughtful, considerate, loving, loyal, a true gentleman, a loving husband, devoted father. In short, if I can ever be half, or even one fourth the man Emery was, I'm in good shape." Jerry Germain

"Just don't know what else to say, except, always a smile, always a kind comment, always left you with a positive feeling". Don Challman

"Em was one of the most positive persons I know, and always had words of encouragement when things weren't going smoothly. He certainly has left a meaningful gift with countless people." Stan Meyer



*Emery Nelson*

## Members; Get to know 'em

My name is **Brent Buresh** and I have been singing Tenor with the GNU for six years. My lovely wife, Rachael, and I live in Mounds View, MN. I have just recently returned to the chorus after a short leave of absence due to the birth of our youngest daughter, Fiona. We have two other girls- Madeline, 11 and Aubrey, 2. I work for Deloitte & Touche as a pension actuary.

I grew up in West Union, IA and music was a big part of my life. I have been singing in church choirs for as long as I can remember. I took piano lessons for 10 years, was a percussionist in the school band, and also played the electric bass in the jazz and pep bands. The school concert choir and swing choir also kept me busy. When I wasn't participating in a musical activity, I was earning 12 varsity letters in football, basketball, track, and baseball.

I attended college at Winona State University in Winona, MN. This is where I got my start in barbershop. I sang in a church choir with Bruce O'Dell (for those of you who




know him, please don't hold that against me!). He invited me to a rehearsal and I've been barbershopping ever since.

Currently, I sing Tenor with the Live Wire quartet. This is my first quartet and I am having a blast.

While I was singing in Winona, Duane Hutton gave me tickets to a GNU annual show. The moment I heard the first chord of that show, I knew where I wanted to sing if I ended up in the Twin Cities. Well, here I am!

# Hilltop Chapter Quartets

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507-934-2372  
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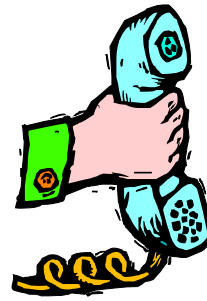


Don Miller, Baritone Denny Jackson, Bass





### The New Hotline #



**763-476-7383**



**Photo by: MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY, Louisville KY U.S.A.**

The Great Northern Union Chorus meets every Thursday from 7:00pm to 10:00pm, at the Greater Minneapolis Jewish Community Center, 4330 Cedar Lake Road in St. Louis Park. Driving North on Hwy. 100 take Cedar Lake Rd. exit and follow to end; driving south, take 394 W, exit on Park Place, which runs in to Cedar Lake Rd. The telephone number at rehearsals is 952-377-8330.

“Early-Bird” rehearsals are held at 6:00pm for practicing S.P. moves. Members are urged to call the GNU Hotline at 763-476-7383 weekly for the latest word on rehearsals, performances, and other pertinent information. Also find us on the web at [www.gnunion.com](http://www.gnunion.com)