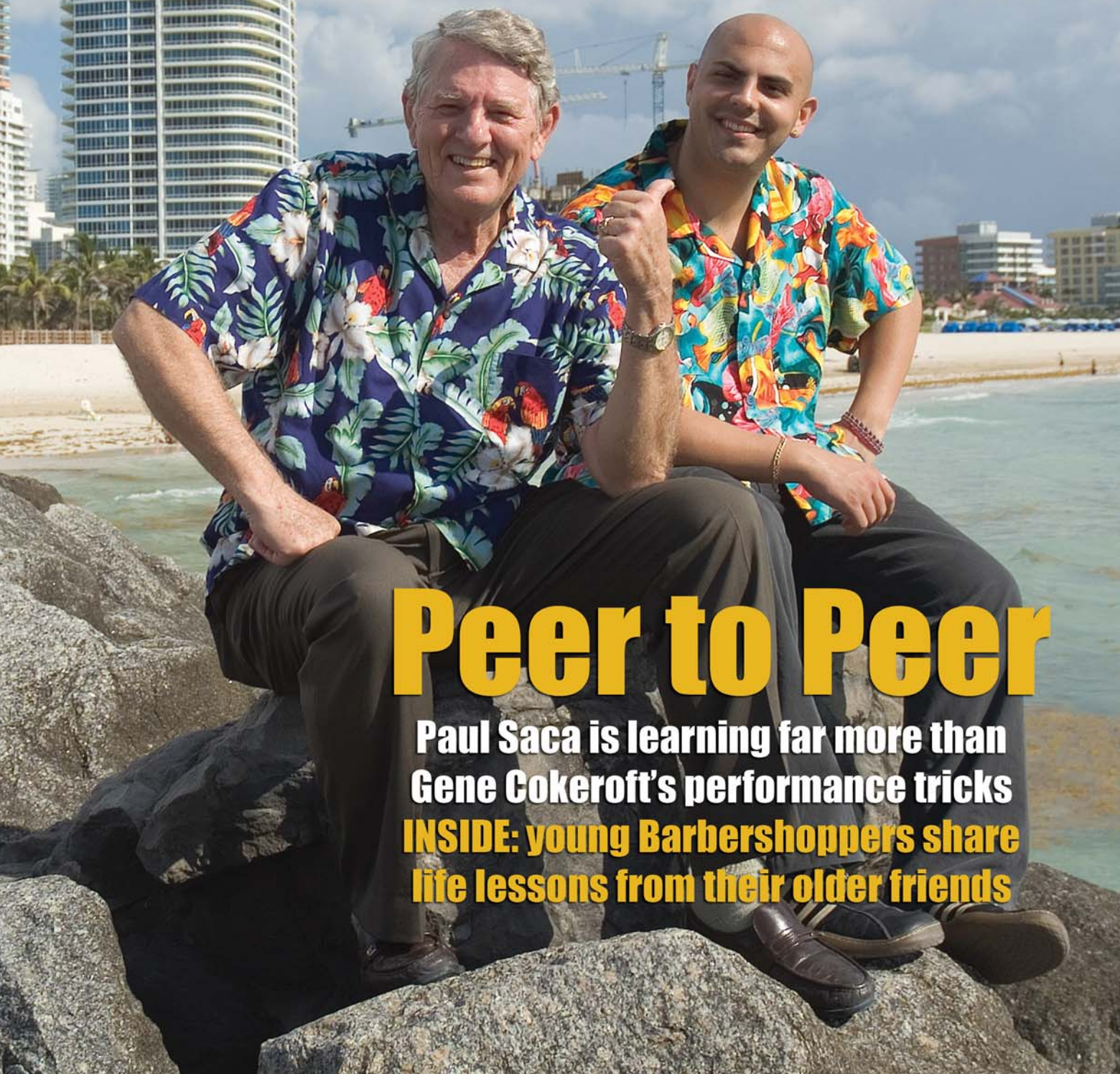


PLUS: Marty Mendro on the Hot Seat • Switch voice parts • College barbershop choruses

May/June 2006

# THE HARMONIZER

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BARBERSHOP HARMONY SOCIETY



## Peer to Peer

Paul Saca is learning far more than Gene Cokeroff's performance tricks  
**INSIDE: young Barbershoppers share life lessons from their older friends**

## Poise

Professional opera singers continually compete against one another for prestige and pay, so auditions and competitions tend to be thick with tension. At such events, Keith Harris's musical peers often wonder whether the rising baritone is oblivious to the pressure, as he calmly and warmly chats backstage with fellow competitors before his own name is called. After his performance is over, judges and peers often comment on how he effortlessly commands the stage and connects with the audience and judges as if he were walking into his own living room.

"From barbershop competitions, I learned that I'm being judged from the moment you see the first part of my body until I leave the stage," says Keith, bass of **Freefall**, the 1997 MBNA America Collegiate Barbershop Quartet champion. "Not very many solo singers know that." While this 2003 Metropolitan Opera Competition winner credits barbershop harmony for giving him a performance edge, it is only one of the advantages he has enjoyed due to his long barbershop career.

Keith began singing barbershop at age nine, and by age 16 was a Land O' Lakes district quartet champion, singing lead in **Family Ties** with his brother, Paul, and their father, Roger. (Paul also sang with Keith in Freefall.) The fact that they were young, talented and family made the kids an audience favorite from the beginning. But Keith believes it would have been hard for the "star" treatment go to their heads, because supporters behaved more like family than like coaches or fans. "That really helped us appreciate what we had won," he said. "It really changes the way you treat people."

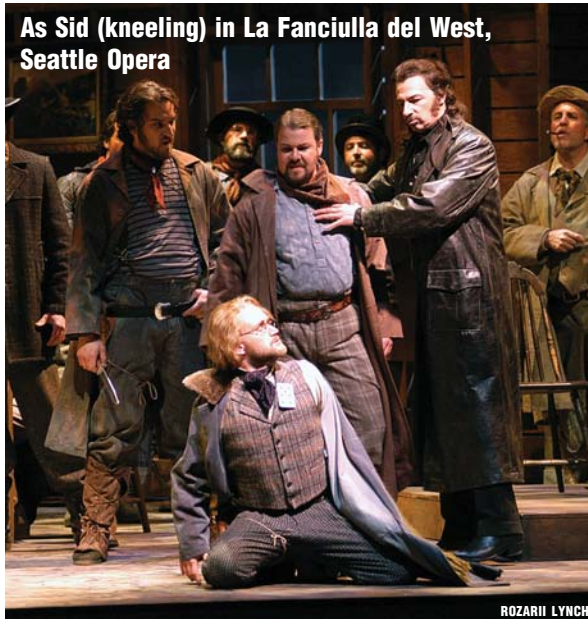
As a young kid watching his father and other Bar-



bershoppers at chapter meetings and other events, Keith saw and practiced gracious behavior and learned how to build a genuine rapport with people he had just met. "Barbershop people are so nice and so welcoming. Every time I went on stage, I felt like I had 2,000 friends right there in the audience," he explains. That attitude persists in his solo career, giving him significant advantages in developing an immediate, comfortable connection with each audience.

Arts organizations cannot support themselves on ticket sales alone, and Keith's native comfort in talking to new people has become a financial asset. "I tell them, 'Please call on me, we'll go out to dinner with patrons and donors and I'll give them the artist's perspective on why I do what I do,'" Keith says. "Those are skills I learned from barbershop."

As Sid (kneeling) in *La Fanciulla del West*,  
Seattle Opera



ROZARII LYNCH

He also believes the family-like barbershop atmosphere of his youth continues to boost his performance level, as well as keep his spirits up during hard times. "What barbershop taught me is to sing because I love it," he says. He thanks barbershop coaches George Gipp, Jim DeBusman and Jay Giallombardo for teaching him only basic singing techniques until he got older. "They said I had the rest of my life to develop a great instrument, and they just let me learn to love singing."

Yet as he obtained that love of singing, he also acquired many musical advantages. In college, his non-barbershop peers recognized that he arrived with an unusually mature musical ear and great

singing and breathing form. Keith, now in his early 30s and living with his wife in New York City, says his current operatic peers have a similar respect for barbershop harmony—not only respect for the effects it has had on Keith, but for

the art form and the performers themselves.

"The Society has done such a great job of putting high quality music out there—people have a high respect for barbershop," he said. As highly trained musicians, they simply know good musicianship when they hear it. And while Keith continues to share the joys of barbershop harmony with others, he gushes about the positive culture that has helped make him the man he is today.

"Everyone [in the Society] is so supportive of each other that I developed an assumption of a goodness in humanity that I take with me in everyday life," he said. "And if you treat people that way, you get it back."

## Family values

Stephen Ditchfield would probably still be singing professionally with his family even if he hadn't discovered barbershop harmony as a teenager. But it wouldn't have been the same for this ordained minister and his family. Barbershop harmony has made his family closer, enabled them all to become better musicians, and helped the children gain greater confidence and maturity.

"I have my children around me all the time," Stephen beams. For him, that's the best part of sharing his hobby in **My Three Sons** quartet with, well, his three sons. "And they're not forced to do this!"

Sons David and Michael have grown up watching the family perform as **The Ditchfield Family Singers**, and by ages 5 and 6 "they were desperate to sing," Stephen recalls. He started singing barbershop with them at home and then, with older son Nathanael, as a novelty act in the family's performances. The two younger boys learned harmonies by ear and became hooked. They all eventually joined the Sarasota, Florida **Chorus of the Keys**, now directed by their father.

"Learning to relate to men of all ages from all walks of life has really given the boys a leg up, and given them a lot of confidence," Stephen says. "I've appreciated having somewhere that I could take my boys and know they would be exposed to good role models." His chorus, composed mostly of retirees, has been like having "100 grandfathers" for his sons.

It doesn't hurt that the boys became good singers at an early age. David and Michael were Sunshine District Novice Quartet Champions by ages 9 and 10, and six years later had earned a district championship and international berth, all singing with their Dad and



**1998  
Sunshine  
District  
Novice  
Quartet  
Champions,  
My Three  
Sons,  
singing  
"Nellie"  
with a 9-  
year-old  
tenor and a  
10-year-old  
lead!**