

Alexandria Harmonizers 70th Anniversary Throwback Thursdays

No. 21 – 1987 A Gift of Music

Kennedy Center Honors Gala Performances

In the year following our first international championship, we received many invitations to perform on shows around the area. This was a welcome surprise for the chapter and we would realize only later that it represented a predictable trend associated directly with that singular contest achievement.

In late 1987 the Harmonizers were invited to participate in the *Kennedy Center Honors Gala* by **Ray Charles**, the Director of the **Ray Charles Singers** (not the soul singer), who was responsible for the vocal music used during the gala. Charles felt it would be appropriate to feature barbershop harmony in a tribute to **Perry Como** who was once a barber and had sung in a barbershop quartet. The plan developed for us to sing a pure barbershop song, “When You Were Sweet Sixteen,” and excerpts from several Como songs. We recorded the music on Friday for we would “lip-sync” during the performance.



Walter Cronkite introduced us as the “Alexandria Harmonizers, Champion Barbershop Singers.” At this point, only **Vaudeville** appeared, after which large vertical panels behind them started moving, revealing one part of the chorus after another. As the final panel moved away, disclosing all 100 men, **Nancy Reagan** reportedly leaned forward with a big smile and said “Wow!” There were admiring comments as we went off stage: **Rosemary Clooney**: “I loved your sound”;

Jimmy Stewart: “That was really great!”; **Lucille Ball**: “I adore your sound”; **Angela Lansbury**: “That was sensational! You really got ‘em.” At show’s end, the Harmonizers came singing down the aisles and joined the dramatic finale. Our fortuitous association with **Ray Charles** and our reputation for creativity, professionalism, and responsiveness resulted in four more Harmonizer “three-minutes-of-fame” tribute performances for the televised Kennedy Center Honors.

1997 **Charlton Heston** Tribute...”we made Moses cry” when **Brian D’Arcy James** and Harmonizers sing Heston’s favorite song, “More I Cannot Wish You”...**President and Mrs. Clinton** join all performers on stage for finale of the 20th Kennedy Center Honors.

2000 **Angela Lansbury** Tribute...Harmonizers and **Len Cariou** present a loving tribute to **Lansbury**, our “Mame”...Finale of “Auld Lang Syne” is tribute to **President Clinton’s** last appearance after eight years.

2001 **Van Cliburn** Tribute...Harmonizers deliver a rousing version of “The Eyes Of Texas” to delight of Texas-born pianist **Van Cliburn** and fellow audience member **President George W. Bush**.

2003 **Mike Nichols** Tribute...**Meryl Streep, Candice Bergen, Christine Baranski, Patrick Wilson, Philip Seymour Hoffman**, supported by the Harmonizers, in a “That’s Entertainment” toast to **Nichols**.

Harmonious Tagline:

In 1989, **Ray Charles** and **Nick Perito**, close collaborators with **Perry Como**, gave the Harmonizers a special song. Arranged by **John Hohl**, “A Gift of Music” became a favorite melody in the Harmonizer repertoire. “A Gift of Music...a gift of song...to bring you happiness your whole life long...”