

Elevating women singers worldwide through education, performance, and competition
in barbershop harmony and a cappella music.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From Grave to Stage: Taking Zombies to Regional Competition

TULSA, Okla. (October 24, 2019) — From the creative mind of Harmony 500 Director Betsy Fowler came a strange vision that even her mother wasn't sure would fly! She wanted to create a fun pop-culture character for her small chorus' regional competition and the first thing that came to mind was...zombies.

"We wanted to do a character and step out of our box," said Betsy. "But when I told my mother she asked, 'What in the world?' She just didn't think we could pull it off."

Known for her determination, Betsy has been a member of Sweet Adelines International for over 20 years and has been an internationally certified front-line director for the Little River Chorus in Angola, Indiana since 2010. She and her small chorus worked hard to bring this ghastly performance "to life" in their package for Great Lakes Regional Competition on May 18, 2019 in Cleveland, Ohio.

So how do you mobilize 22 women to dress, walk and perform like zombies, all while sounding fantastic, of course?

"We began the brainstorming process, first with costumes, makeup, song rep and then characterizations," said Betsy.

Cindy Givens, team president, began by contacting choruses in the region asking for old costumes. With the understanding that they wouldn't be returned, costumes began to appear at harmony weekends, in the mail and whenever Betsy's car window was left open. Several costume distressing parties were held, and attendees were asked to bring all manner of tools, including scissors, razor knives, rasps and sandpaper. (By the way, the chorus learned that Sweet Adelines costumes are almost indestructible!)

Excitement began brewing with the makeup team as they "practiced" various methods of zombification. Betsy choose not to have bloody or disgusting zombies, so the decision was made early on to go in a more glamorous direction, "as we are Sweet Adelines after all," she said.

Internet searches revealed several tutorials on glam zombie makeup, and off they went to experiment. Light base was applied under clown white to give a grayish tone with shades of black, purple and red around the eyes, ending with dark red lipstick and heavy thick eyelashes. Once all this was in place, they needed to marry the music with the character so there was no doubt to the audience and judges what was going on.

"With the help of our wonderful coach, Lynne Pierce, we tweaked a few lyrics in our song selections which lead to hysterics and mayhem within the chorus," said Betsy.

The package takes place in the year 2119 with a reunion chorus of Region 17 members who are missing all their old friends and feeling quite alone. The ballad, 'Where Have My Old Friends Gone?' was chosen because "we're lonely, clueless zombies...Think Betty White as a zombie.," said Betsy.

Onstage, the director (Betsy) soon "realizes" between songs that "we're all together again, and as we recognize that our friends haven't left us, we break out into our up tune, 'Fit as a Fiddle.'"

Several sight gags included Betsy's now famous floppy arm bow complete with bare feet and leg makeup as well as all her "guts" hanging out. (So much for glamorous zombies.) The audience was further worked into hysterics as one chorus member lost an arm while "harmonizing the world."

"Performing next to last in the competition worked to our advantage as the auditorium was filled with all the previous competitors who were curious as to what exactly we were up to," said Betsy. "From the moment we lumbered on stage until we departed, no pun intended, we kept in character and were a huge success."

Betsy said the chorus had three goals: 1) Do something we hadn't seen before. 2) Sing at our highest level. 3) Have a ton of fun.

With the highest score in the history of the chorus, a 521, Little River Chorus earned 2nd place Small Chorus and Most Improved by 90 points over last year.

"I'd say we achieved our goal," said Betsy.

To view the zombie horde, visit <https://livestream.com/accounts/6101454/events/8652444>. The Little River performance appears in Part 2 of the webcast at marker 1:26:31. Watch if you dare!

Photo: Little River Chorus, E.R. Lilley Photography

