

Montreal– 2003

Barbershop Men's International Competition

OH CANADA. Bill and I just returned home from our vacation in Montreal and Quebec. What a fascinating new world to explore. We started in Quebec City where we spent a few days. Old European architecture is everywhere. The influence of the British is still there with flowers and gardens while the French still command the language and spirit. It's a lovely small town totally dependent on tourism and just waiting for a honeymoon couple or group looking for a special weekend get-away. We heard that it was one of the most visited cities in the world. And it should be, it's charming. Traveling onward, we took the train down to Montreal. Now here we found a big city complete with traffic jams, pollution and homeless people. However... Montreal has a magic worth seeing. There is music everywhere. Harps in the park, bands in every restaurant, drums in the subway, and dancers on the street. The romantic blend of food and music keeps the city stays alive until the wee hours of the morning. Montreal is an island....who knew? It is croissant shaped and about 11 by 30 miles in size. It took us awhile to understand that East and West do not necessarily conform with the direction of the sun, but to the curve of the rivers edge. After we understood this fact, it was actually easy to get around. I loved all the trees. It's a beautiful green city with lots and lots of outdoor cafes, colorful flower boxes and culture. A true blend of Paris, London and Melbourne. But the weather is another story. Yarg!! Horribly hot in the summer and miserably cold in the winter. I hear that five feet of snow for six months is not uncommon and that it doesn't stop anyone either. I found the social structure interesting. Most Canadians there do not own a home....they rent a small apartment. Taxes seem to add up to more than 50% of an earned dollar and there is pressure that it is time for change! They have the usual problems of unemployment even with free education. Medical care really is free, but you might not get it when you want it. Reading the paper and hearing their news, made me see that once again, most people are the same. Bottom line is, they want everything and then complain when they have to pay a price for it. While Bill and I were in Montreal, we attended an International Barbershop Competition. One of the members at the convention wrote a rendition of the Canadian National Anthem and added it to our own Star Spangled Banner. Together they were joined and sung with a harmony and spirit that was truly inspirational. WOW. I don't know how I could ever describe the blend and perfection of notes and chords that takes music to this kind of spiritual level. For those of you who know the Canadian National Anthem, you will understand how powerful those first words are to their nation. They are proud words sung loud and strong. And our own anthem answered that our flag was still there--- promising freedom to a land of the brave. I still get chills thinking about it. The International Barbershop Competition had 13,000 members in Montreal under one dome. This was the best of the best competing from around the world. The Olympics of singing. There were 21 choruses that reached the international level. Each one had its own show, complete with amazing choreography and costumes. And there were 40 quartets. Each put together their own show too—some funny, some serious, but all sung with a desire of being the best with perfect pitch and four part harmony. It was so sad that only five groups would receive a medal. I'm glad I didn't have to do that judging. After all was done, the convention closed with all 13,000 members singing TEACH THE CHILDREN TO SING and KEEP THE WHOLE WORLD SINGING. Amen.