

Making any space a musical place

By Stephen Snyder, Times Staff Writer

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KEN KOONS/STAFF PHOTO



Shannon Kiser directs the Old Line Statesmen during a rehearsal at Carroll Lutheran Village.

Shannon Kiser loves a cappella music.

"You can just walk into any room, any space and just make it a musical place," said the new director of the Old Line Statesmen Barbershop Chorus.

"I'm really drawn to that a cappella style."

Kiser joined as director of the all-male barbershop chorus in February, taking over for its previous director of 12 years, Jeff Liebknecht. He met the group at an event for boys put on by the Children's Chorus of Carroll County.

Diane Jones, director of the children's chorus, invited the Statesmen to sing at an annual "boy's night" to show young boys that they can continue singing through adulthood.

Kiser, a co-director of the children's choir, had never seen the Statesmen perform before that event.

"The level that they performed at that night piqued my interest," Kiser recalled.

Meanwhile, the Statesmen had been looking for a new director to replace Liebknecht for nearly a year.

"It's very hard to find a director for anything, especially a barbershop chorus," said Dale Wilhelm, president of the Statesmen.

Liebknecht and a few other members approached Kiser about leading the chorus and he agreed.

"I'm just a lover of music and choral singing of all types," he said.

Kiser grew up in Virginia and received a bachelor's degree in music from Covenant College in Tennessee and a master's degree from Peabody Conservatory. Last year he became a co-director with the children's chorus, where he leads the fourth and fifth-grade students.

For the members of the Statesmen, having a director with such an advanced musical background is a new experience.

"It's a turning point for the chorus," said Wilhelm. "It's the first time we've had a really professionally trained director."

As in any major transition, the group members needed some time to adjust to their new director.

Al Fiedler, a member of the Statesmen for about 20 years, recalls the first rehearsal Kiser led. Instead of finding the starting note with a pitch pipe - common in barbershop singing - Kiser used a tuning fork.

"I almost fell on the floor," Fiedler recalled.

But the group has come to accept Kiser as its new director, Fiedler said.

The group also has a new assistant director, Chad Kardell. A graduate of McDaniel College, Kardell has performed with the Statesmen for a few years and served as interim director before Kiser started.

The group performs its first concert with Kiser on Sunday. The show features a program of all Doo Wop classics sung in the barbershop, a cappella style and will include a few surprises, including lindy hop dancers and a 5-and-a-half-foot tall jukebox.

Fiedler said the concert will have another surprise as well, but he didn't want to give it away.

"Five minutes before the show, something is going to happen," he said coyly. "It's never been done before to my knowledge."

But for Kiser, the real draw is the music.

"It's really kind of nice to hear some of these old favorite songs being sung in the a cappella style," he said.

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#### 'Doo Wop and Barbershop

The Old Line Statesmen Barbershop Chorus presents its 22nd annual Barbershop Harmony Show, "Doo Wop and Barbershop," at 3 p.m. Sunday at the Scott Center Theater at Carroll Community College at 1601 Washington Road in Westminster.

The concert features the chorus, along with quartets All in Accord and Gentlemen's Blend, performing Doo Wop hits of the '50s and '60s. Additional performers include Glenn Patterson as the disc jockey/emcee and special guest dancers from Lindy Hoppers Unlimited, LLC.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and free for children 6 and younger. Tickets are available at Coffey Music, Stu's Music Shop, the Carroll Arts Center or at the door. For more information or to reserve tickets visit [www.oldlinestatesmen.org](http://www.oldlinestatesmen.org).