

Harmony, Inc.'s decision to discontinue Harmony Grace and Two Nations

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why were Harmony Grace and Two Nations removed? You are discriminating against Christians.

A: The Equality and Diversity Committee of Harmony, Inc. was tasked with the work of raising awareness about diversity and the value of inclusion. In recent years the EDC has been educating members and listening to their concerns. The frustration shared most often was the discomfort many members had with singing Harmony Grace, a Christian song, and with Two Nations which mentions “sprung from one ancient line serving one God divine.” Many of our members are Christian but our members are also of other faiths and non-religious, spiritual and non-spiritual, pagan, agnostic and atheist. As we are not a religious organization, we feel that the singing of these two songs excludes many of our members and therefore are contrary to the commitment to be an inclusive organization.

Q: Couldn't you just change a few words to “Two Nations” rather than remove this song?

A: The problem with changing only a few words is that many people will continue singing the old words because that's what they know. For example, in Canada the national anthem changed one word in order to be more inclusive. Rather than “*in all our sons command*” it was changed to “*in all of us command*”. You'll find many Canadians still singing the old version which creates confusion when someone is trying to learn the new version. Also, keeping the same song with a different word or two may still bring up discomfort based on the previous version. The memory of the old words and meaning may linger.

Q: If our chapter decides we want to sing Harmony Grace are we permitted to do so?

A: That would defeat the purpose of removing songs that exclude some of our members. Many members are uncomfortable sharing their feelings and will opt to “not rock the boat” rather than voice opposition to something that makes them feel excluded. As an organization we are committed to learning about and implementing inclusive policies and practices.

Q: Is this the first time Harmony, Inc. has made a decision to remove songs that excluded members?

A: No. In 2019 four songs were removed from our Here's Harmony Series due to their racist roots and offensiveness to African Americans. Those songs were: “Back in Dixie Again,” “Dixie Boy,” “Steamin' Down the River,” and “Welcome Back to Dixieland.” So-called “Dixie” songs invoke imagery that didn't exist for a large segment of the population in America – its slaves. “Dixie” songs are a holdover from the minstrel era, and one reason for their popularity in our style of music was they were seen as the epitome of the barbershop style – the chords, harmonic movement, and singable melody lines are all strong examples of the barbershop style. Many songs from the era of Tin Pan Alley were written at a time in America when it was considered acceptable to see blackface on the covers of sheet music, on stage and on screen, and for song lyrics to include racial and ethnic stereotypes that would be considered highly offensive today.

Q: You are taking things away from us. Don't you value our history and the work our founding sisters did?

A: We believe that the changes we are making are because of the work our founding sisters did. They recognized an injustice in another women's barbershop organization and wanted to make things better. They saw that women were being excluded and wanted to start an organization where white and black women could sing together. That was 60 years ago and we know people are being excluded for many reasons such as sexual orientation, religion, race, gender identity, disabilities and age, to name just a few. We value our history but we also value our future and the women who will one day call Harmony, Inc. home!

Q: Next thing we know you'll be telling us we can't sing Christmas songs!

A: As singers and performers we love entertaining our audience, and Christmas songs during the holidays are welcome. In the spirit of inclusion, however, we do encourage our members to include a variety of songs during this time so that our members and our audience, who are not religious or are of different faiths, can feel connected to the celebration through song. Some of the ways our chapters have been doing this is to ensure the repertoire includes non-religious Christmas songs (Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer), songs from other faiths (Hanukkah Medley) and holiday songs from other cultures (Feliz Navidad). It is not about taking something away from you. It is about adding to the beautiful mosaic that is created when we think from a mindset of inclusiveness.

Q: I don't agree with your decision to remove these songs and possibly other songs that we have enjoyed for decades. I am thinking of leaving Harmony, Inc. because of this!

A: We know that not all members will be happy with the decision to discontinue songs that have been a part of Harmony, Inc. for many years. Harmony, Inc. is excited about building on a history of inclusion and as we become more aware and educated about the effects of exclusion, we are even more committed to nurturing an organization that values all members. We hope that you will stay with us and share in the growth and opportunities an inclusive organization will bring to all members.

Q: I've heard about inclusion and diversity but I really don't know anything about it. Can you give me some suggestions that would help me understand why this is so important?

A: Absolutely and thank you for wanting to learn more! Harmony, Inc.'s Equality and Diversity Committee has its own page in the [Members Only](#) section of our website. There you will find two sections of resources. One is in response to Harmony, Inc.'s [Call To Action](#) and contains resources to understand what racism, anti-racism and white privilege are all about. The second resource section is about equality, diversity and inclusion. If you've never visited the Members Only section of Harmony, Inc.'s website, you'll need your ID # which is found on your membership card. You'll also need a password. If you don't have one or forgot your password please contact webmaster@harmonyinc.org to get that arranged.