



Wait... What? A Cappella Joy Chorus is *HOW* Old?

On May 1st, we will be 63-years-old. No, that wasn't a typo. 😊 We chartered in 1958 as the Lakeside Chorus. As many know, Lakeside was a powerhouse over the years, consistently winning regional competitions and participating in many international contests, often placing in the top ten. There are many Region 13 members who sang in Lakeside and who have gone on to sing with or start other choruses and quartets.

A major event in 1996 changed our world forever: Zoe Thompson, who had been director for 25 years, announced to the chorus's 130 members that she was retiring. Zoe was synonymous with Lakeside; who was the chorus without her vision and leadership? That was a question that took a very long time to answer.

Without going into all of the difficult and heart-wrenching details, we'd like to give you the "Cliff Notes" version so you can learn more about what makes AJoy, well... AJoy!

(continued from eblast...) The most important issue we needed to address was the question of identity—who did we want to be?—so we paused to glean all the good qualities of the chorus we wanted to retain, let go of any bits that we were ready to leave behind, and added in what an ideal chorus would look like for us. This was hard work that took much time. It was difficult to balance stepping back, with keeping the chorus going, while losing members left and right. We cycled through a series of temporary and semi-permanent directors as we watched our ranks dwindle to 90, then 75, then 50, 35, and down to 16. Would we ever be able to create our ideal chorus? Was it even possible?

Sweet Adelines International helped us at this point by reducing the number a chorus needed to have on stage to compete from 20 to 15. In 2001 we took the Region 13 contest stage with 19 members and came in 1st place small chorus, 5th overall. Were we on our way out of this crazy transition? We had hoped so, but this wasn't to be. Not

yet, anyway. Just when we thought things couldn't get any worse, we parted with our director and began again.

We continued to audition directors and more members left. It got so discouraging that, one rehearsal night, after having just received an email that our new director was quitting, the seven remaining members showed up and had to wonder about their sanity. Was it ever going to be possible to create the chorus we really wanted?

After an intense heart-to-heart, we agreed to give it just one more week. A member mentioned that she worked with someone who had a music degree and that she would ask her to come and direct the following Monday. That someone was Nikki Blackmer. While Nikki had no barbershop background and was a mere 28-years-old, we immediately fell in love with each other and not one person doubted that she was exactly the right person to lead this new chorus. That was February 2003 and the rest, as they say, is history. We've been building on the vision ever since.

In May 2003 we decided to change the chorus name. We found that it was getting in the way of others seeing us for who we wanted to be. While we are proud of the Lakeside legacy—it has laid the groundwork for who we are today—we needed to grow past the history in order to be able to create a new chapter in the life of the chorus. Everyone came with suggestions and together we chose a new name that would describe what we wanted to express each time we sang. It was an unusual name at the time and we got more than a few comments about how it sounded more like a quartet than a chorus name. An important component from our roots and towards our vision includes being on the cutting edge of what's new and helping the barbershop world to advance; the A Cappella Joy name was a positive step in that direction. (In case you were wondering, we took on our nickname, AJoy, around the time that Alex Rodriguez was playing for the Mariners and became known as ARod.)



Who is AJoy? We are young singers of all ages, races, religions, nationalities, ethnicities, gender expressions, and vocal ranges who respect and honor each other. When we audition new members we not only evaluate singing ability but also seek the right personality and culture fit. We are each committed to constant personal and musical growth. Our sense of humor is a bit irreverent (yes, okay... more than a bit), we have lots of fun, and we definitely like thinking "outside the box". We challenge the status quo and look for new and inclusive ways to express our barbershop art form. We step up and volunteer to do the chorus jobs needed so we can share the responsibilities among all of us. We love, love, love our musical and creative directors, Nikki Blackmer and Judy Pozsgay, to bits and are so grateful for their amazing myriad talents. We are dedicated to building a strong, loving, and welcoming community within Region 13 and the broader Sweet Adeline world.

This past year of zoom rehearsals has been challenging for us, as we know it has been for all of you. We look forward to when we can be together again to sing with, laugh with, and hug each other.

Submitted by: Carol Vecchio