

as president of the Greater Harrisburg Chorus and is a member of the Sweet Adelines membership committee. "I don't really know why it is that we're always one of the best-kept secrets in music, but it is what it is. They're expecting to see us dressed in Victorian costumes and that everybody's going to be old, like your grandma's nice little dowdy chorus. We're beyond that. We wear snazzy costumes; we have a choreographer; we sing big; we sing loud; it's fast-paced. We don't stand there holding music."

The chorus performs barbershop arrangements from a variety of genres including jazz, pop, Broadway and more. While much of the potential repertoire involves standards from the 1940's, more and more modern songs have been made available, much to the delight of the younger Sweet Adelines.

"We're just everyday women who love to sing; the youngest is 28, and I have six women (three are sisters) who have been in Sweet Adelines for 50-plus years

and never miss a rehearsal," says Claire Domenick, choir director. "There's something about the hobby that is very welcoming and makes you want to be there."

## World Choir Games

Typically groups in Sweet Adelines compete against each other in yearly regional competition to vie for a spot in the following year's international championship. In addition to Sweet Adelines competitions, the Greater Harrisburg Chorus puts on dinner theatres and recitals and gets hired to do corporate or community events.

In 2012, however, Greater Harrisburg stepped beyond the Sweet Adelines circuit to participate in—and win—the inaugural barbershop division of the World Choir Games (WCG), an Olympics-inspired competition. Last year the 11-day event brought together more than 15,000 singers from 64 countries representing 362 choirs in 23 musical categories.

When members of Greater Harrisburg heard about the WCG coming to the United States for the first time, they decided to travel and compete in Cincinnati instead of their regular Sweet Adelines regional contest, which they had never skipped. The WCG allowed Greater Harrisburg to compete against male groups, independent groups and groups from Harmony Inc., a rival organization to Sweet Adelines.

"We just needed a break to do something different," Domenick says. "The invitation came to compete at the World Choir Games, and I just thought this might be a different venue for us to expose the world to barbershop."

To prepare for the WCG, they researched rules and judging criteria and tailored their set to them. "We did a little research on how the WCG were going to be judged because we're used to the judging criteria for Sweet Adelines, but we weren't sure about the WCG," Ryan says. "So part of our preparation was making sure that we competed smartly as well as sang well, and that definitely helped us in the contest."

Domenick knew they had something special upon arrival in Cincinnati. "It was a magical performance," she says. "Even in rehearsals I knew something special was happening because every

time we started, it was good. There wasn't a time I had to say 'Let's do that again; it's not right.'"

Although the women felt good about their performance, they never expected to win gold. When they heard the announcement, many of them were overcome with emotion. "Being at the World Choir Games and winning that gold medal is right there at the top of my favorite memories," says Pat Gasper, Greater Harrisburg Chorus travel director. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and the thrill of us winning was indescribable. It was just amazing."


While the group is still debating whether defending its title in Latvia is financially and logistically feasible, it has enjoyed other opportunities since its big win.

"Our publicity coming out of World Choir Games helped us out a lot; we were very grateful to get some local recognition after we came home with the medals from that," Ryan says. "It paid off, and it's been a lot of fun to be able to announce ourselves as World Choir Games champions."

## Friends and Family

While a medal is nice, the women cite their friendships as the best thing about being a member of Greater Harrisburg and Sweet Adelines. Some women compete and perform with multiple Sweet Adelines choruses, and many also belong to quartets and smaller groups within the organization. "The women who are closest to me and my very best friends are in Greater Harrisburg Chorus," Ryan says. "They're like family to me. I'm not a native to the Harrisburg area, and these women are my family here."

Whether you're a college student, a mom or a retiree, the women of Sweet Adelines and Greater Harrisburg Chorus would encourage you to join or at least visit a rehearsal.

Ryan hopes that more women can have an experience similar to hers. "Don't be afraid to try it," she says. "You might not have any experience at all, and that's kind of daunting, but don't let it keep you from at least exploring what Sweet Adelines and other music groups have to offer and what you might have to offer them. It's worth the effort." 

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