

## All women, all alto, a capella, all the time

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By Diccon Hyatt



An a cappella singing group with all-female members is a pretty rare thing most places, but not in Hopewell Valley, where the ladies of Skillman-based Key of She have been performing regularly for more than a decade, delighting local venues with their unique deep-voiced sound.

Key of She has had its high and low notes over the years. It found popularity in 2001, and opened for Ray Charles in 2002. The group won Audience Choice at the New York Harmony Sweepstakes the same year. In 2008, the group's fortunes started to falter along with the economy, and they played fewer and fewer concerts.

Key of She founder Sue Jaques said the group now has new energy after recruiting three new members, including Hopewell Borough resident Cheryl Wnek, in addition to original members Jaques and Amy Raditz.

Wnek brings an unusual talent to the group: she sings bass percussion, a part normally reserved for a low-voiced man in a vocal group. And her recruitment couldn't have come at a better time, Jaques said.

Early this year, Key of She performed what could have been its last concert, at Vinalhaven, Maine. Several of the group's members had decided it was time to take a year's sabbatical. At first, Jaques, along with other original member Amy Raditz, agreed. But She soon reconsidered.

"We had an epiphany," Jaques said. "Isn't Key of She meant to be an expression of singing? Why don't we re-invent another Key of She?"

Instead of taking a break, Jaques decided to redouble her efforts, and recruited three new members to replace the ones who had left.

After auditions, they selected Wnek and Carol Heffler and Sheila Truncillito. The reconstituted Key of She played its first performance Feb. 26 at Hopewell Valley Vineyard in front of a sizeable crowd.

Despite the new mix of voices, Key of She has the main part of its old distinctive sound, which is distinctly lacking in high-pitched voices.

"We have five altos and that gives us our deep sound," Jaques said. "We didn't want any vibrato. The lower the better, as far as we're concerned."

Key of She sings covers of popular tunes, plus a few parodies. Their biggest hit is "Bald Headed Men" by Christine Lavin. They sing in a tightly-harmonized jazz style.

The group is still feeling out how the new members will fit in. They have numerous concerts booked in the area in the spring and summer, including a return to Hopewell Valley Vineyards July 1.

"It's the revival of Key of She, and it's an exciting time for us," Jaques said.

Wnek, who works as a health inspector in West Windsor, was previously in the Hopewell Valley Choir and the Belle

Nottes. Before that, she sang in barbershop quartets, but found the style too restrictive after 10 years.

“I decided I didn’t want to do that anymore because barbershop is very structured with chords,” Wnek said. “No percussion is allowed. It has to be four-part harmony with certain kinds of chords.”

She jumped at the chance to join Key of She when she recieved an e-mail that the group was looking for new members. Key of She will perform and build up a new repertoire of songs. Later, they might record another record to add to the Key of She catalogue of two albums.

“In the meantime, we’re having fun singing together, Raditz said. “The purpose is to have the ability to do something we love and are passionate about and express the passion of our voices. There is a camaraderie that goes along with it, and the rehearsals are fun. It’s really unique.”

For more information, including a schedule of upcoming concerts, go online to [keyofshe.com](http://keyofshe.com).

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