



## **A Cappella “Under My Skin”**

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**All-female a cappella group Key of She will host and perform at *Harmonic Convergence*, a gathering of contemporary a cappella groups at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton, Oct. 13.**

Now that the women in Key of She have mastered the art of singing through microphones, they've doubled their volume, although they've shrunk in size. As the premier all-female a cappella group in the area, Key of She remains true to its "street corner serenade" roots, even though the name has changed and the sound has gone electric. The only difference is the group — formerly known as Double Treble — will now travel with three vehicles full of electronic sound gizmos.

"It's going to be strange hauling the mikes and monitors and all that big stuff around," says co-founder Sue Jaques. "It won't be just six ladies in one car laughing all the way to the show."

Key of She has been making sonic waves at several Pennsylvania performances this year, but hasn't appeared in its adopted hometown of Princeton. The six women will debut their smooth, sultry sound and on-stage antics at *Harmonic Convergence*, a concert featuring some of the East Coast's best contemporary a cappella groups, at Nassau Presbyterian Church, Oct. 13 at 2 p.m.

The concert also will feature area favorites Jersey Transit, Jones Falls Express from Baltimore, The Conn Artists from Westport, Conn., and Boston's The Works. Ms. Jaques says it's a chance for the groups — who are all friends in the brotherhood of a cappella — to reunite, compare notes and, of course, sing together.

This year's concert holds special meaning, since proceeds will be donated to the American Red Cross general fund to benefit families of the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks.

The concert had originally been planned as a casual gathering of friends, something the various groups have been doing for about six years. "Within a day after Sept. 11, we all decided to turn it into a benefit," Ms. Jaques says.

Singing was also a way for the individual vocalists to heal.

"We rehearsed about four days after Sept. 11," Ms. Jaques says. "It really brought us out of our funk. We get so much joy from singing and making harmony."

Ms. Jaques won't give her age but is old enough to remember singing along with The Four Freshman and The Chiffons on the AM radio of her parents' car. She fell in love with the harmonies of the doo-wop era, sang harmony herself at age 4 and was writing arrangements when she was 7.

She directed an a cappella group at Smith College, then founded the Boudinotes, a pun on Colonial-era politician Elias Boudinot, after she and her husband moved to Princeton in the early '70s. The Boudinotes evolved into Double Treble, which was famous for hosting "Singsation." For seven years, the popular

Princeton event had been an annual destination for some of the 10,000 a cappella groups from the United States and abroad. The plug was pulled after the concert in June, 2000, however, thanks to a bizarre lawsuit over an "unintentional trademark infringement," Ms. Jaques says.

Double Treble officially disbanded, but several members expressed interested in re-grouping and started rehearsing a whole new sound in January, 2001.

The addition of electronics has allowed Key of She to experiment with imitating instrumental parts, especially "vocal percussion," à la Bobby McFerrin. In fact, it was Mr. McFerrin's 1988 recording of "Don't Worry, Be Happy" that kicked off a resurgence of interest in a cappella music. Once associated with barbershop and collegiate ensembles, a cappella groups now do everything from gospel to heavy metal music.

"We're doing a more cutting edge type of material," Ms. Jaques says. "There are no sopranos in the group — we're all altos, which makes for a much lower sound and tighter harmony. So our range is a little decreased, but there's a lot more rhythm in what we're doing now."

Key of She's repertoire includes a rocking version of "Seasons of Love" from the Broadway show *Rent*, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons' "I've Got You Under My Skin" and a generous helping of Shania Twain's music. The group is also hoping to perform Sarah MacLachlan's poignant "Angel."

"It would be a very good song to do, if our soloist can get through it. It's very emotional. The words are incredible and have more meaning than they've ever had before," Ms. Jaques says. "We're going to close with a gorgeous arrangement of 'America the Beautiful,' with all the groups performing."

Perhaps the act of creation is one way for man to stand up to destruction. Or maybe it's just purely physical — you have to breathe deeply to sing well, which helps send calming, clarifying oxygen to the brain. Ms. Jaques acknowledges the therapeutic value of making and sharing music, whatever the explanation might be.

"For people who are still suffering, we hope this might be a way to feel better. There'll be a lot of fun and laughter. Being foolish is one of our trademarks."

***Key of She*** hosts and performs at *Harmonic Convergence*, a gathering of contemporary a cappella groups, at Nassau Presbyterian Church, 61 Nassau St., Princeton, Oct. 13, 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$12. For information, call (609) 466-2494.