



# THE ERA OF GENERATION BARBERSHOP

**F**our-part harmony is arguably one of the most challenging undertakings in which a singer can learn and excel. Sweet Adelines boasts nearly 23,000 “extreme a cappella” singers with a knack for performing and harmonizing at this elite level.

Members from 8 years old to those in their 90s not only learn the art form together but perform seamlessly, as if they were from the same generation with the same life experiences. The ability of barbershop a cappella to unite women of all ages, races and backgrounds is the strength of Sweet Adelines as a sisterhood, as well as our “extreme sport.” If a traditional vocalist can be likened to a recreational climber, a barbershopper, on the other hand, is someone who regularly climbs Mount Everest. Not only are Sweet Adelines’ members reaching the top summits; they do it with style and make it look easy.

In the last decade, pop culture has catapulted the a cappella style into the forefront through television series, reality shows, and movies dramatizing the talent, performance, and commitment necessary to be part of a successful chorus. This has given rise to a new generation of a cappella singers who are carving out their place in the barbershop world. With this influx of new voices, the genre is more diverse than ever before, leading us to collectively dub ourselves “Generation Barbershop.”

Generation Barbershop is not about a number. Generation Barbershop is not about money. Generation Barbershop is not about color, profession or any other attribute that is typically used to define women. On the contrary, Generation Barbershop breaks down all of those exterior barriers and reveals our commonalities: the music, the bonds of sisterhood, and the ability to perform at the most elite level.

We are all Generation Barbershop — the teenage girl who decided to give her school chorus a try after seeing an a cappella competition on TV, the college girl looking to find her place on campus, the busy mom who needs some “me time,” the empty nester who finds herself with fewer commitments, the retiree who is ready for a new chapter. We believe Generation Barbershop refers to anyone who undertakes the rigors of the art of barbershop, someone who is working on the “four-part harmony, 11-chord challenge” and is mastering this “extreme sport” in her own way.

How do the women of Generation Barbershop define themselves? While there’s no one-sentence, textbook definition (you are all too unique and fabulous for that!), we asked you to tell us what Generation Barbershop means to you, and your responses were overwhelming. In your own words, here’s how some of you define Generation Barbershop:



**“How do I define ‘Generation Barbershop?’**

In a word — ageless. Through Sweet Adelines I have friends from their teens to their 80s, and each of them enriches my life. Sweet Adelines International has Diversity with a capital D. Our chorus includes doctors, teachers, homemakers, students, business professionals and so many others. Our members come from as far away as England. It’s improbable that my path would have crossed with any of them, if not for our mutual love of barbershop harmony. We share more than music — we celebrate life’s joyous occasions, and support each other through the hard times. Our friendships cross generations, time and geography. There’s just nothing else like it.” —**Amanda Stevens**

**“Barbershop to me is like home... The one**

kind of music I’ve always had by my side and loved just the way it is. I sing it, and everything that’s wrong in the world vanishes. Sweet Adelines

isn’t just family. We’re not just sisters. Being one of the youngest in my chorus, I’m in a group of sisters who are like mothers to me. Barbershop unites us. It unites generations, regardless of what has come between us in history.”

—**Michaela Marie Olson**

**“The whole is so much greater than the** sum of its parts — the magic of a totally unified sound.” —**Sun and Sing attendee**

**“It strikes me that a chorus creates a kind** of time lapse. We look at members who are 10, 20 or 30 years younger and get a glimpse of our past (or a past that might have been) as we watch them face milestones such as finishing a degree, getting married, buying a house, finding a career, having a baby... facing the challenge that comes with starting out in life. We look at others who are 10, 20 or 30 years older and can see variations on our possible future as they achieve

career success, watch their children leave the nest, grow apart or grow closer to a spouse, spoil grandchildren, retire and pursue interests long denied... facing challenges that come with aging. The time lapse of the chorus lets us see and appreciate the various chapters of life all at the same time, a view that is nearly impossible when we are turning each page in our own life. And with this view, we come to respect and value the experiences and strengths of other women; women we might never have met if it weren’t for Sweet Adelines. The time lapse not only gives us a glimpse of the future, but lets us model and emulate those we admire. We look at the long-time, talented and invaluable member and think, ‘Maybe someday I can learn to be knowledgeable... or accepting... or compassionate... or patient... or supportive... or vibrant... like her.’” (\*Excerpt from a beloved member’s funeral\*) —**Jennifer Palus**