

# Sweet Adelines' Young Singers: History in the Making

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*Above: The Junior Misses were all 19 or younger when crowned the 1956 Queens of Harmony. Christine Coe (bass); Helen Melzer (baritone); Katie Curnette (lead); Sue Brown (tenor).*



*Left: Authors Helen Melzer Peters and Lora Wright.*

Last summer, The Pitch Pipe ran an article about our first and youngest chartered chapter, Basically Treble. Actually, Sweet Adelines has always had talented young singers among our ranks. This fact gave birth to this article, as our organization has so much rich history to preserve for posterity.

Helen Melzer (Peters), from the Junior Misses Quartet, first directed a young women's chorus in 1958. Famed barbershop educator Floyd "Pop" Connett asked Helen to form and direct what became the Junior Belles, a group of 50 young women, aged 10 through high school. They entertained to great acclaim at the international competition in Peoria, Ill., that year.

The young chorus sang at many jobs around town, including Sweet Adeline-associated appearances. Several of the girls went on to become barbershop "stars" in their own right, including: Linda Connett,

daughter of Floyd and Maxine Connett; Julie Brown Snider, whose sister Susie sang with a top-five quartet; and Valerie Perdue, daughter of Glen Perdue, an infamous barbershopper.

However, the "youth movement" was largely launched in the mid-1950s, with the Junior Misses Quartet. The Misses included Helen, then a 19-year-old baritone; Sue (t), age 16; Katie (l), age 17; and Chris (bs), age 16.

The quartet planned to sing at the 1955 competition in Grand Rapids, Mich. In those days, Sweet Adelines was so new that you did not have to win a regional contest to compete further with other top quartets.

The Junior Misses did very well in preliminary competition but were almost disqualified due to a new requirement — enacted in Grand Rapids — that Sweet Adelines must be at least 18. At the time, our leaders believed minor-aged singers

were not ready for the responsibility of competition and representing the organization fully if they were crowned.

However, despite the ruling, Maxine Connett (SA president, 1959-1960) made sure the Junior Misses were "grandfathered in" and allowed to compete. They came in second.

The quartet was back on the national stage in 1956, in Wichita, Kan. They went home as the 1956 Queens of Harmony.

Sweet Adelines eventually realized the importance of engaging young women in our beloved barbershop harmony so future generations could carry on the legacy of our art form and our organization. That realization gave rise to the Young Women in Harmony program and other youth-oriented outreach.

The lesson learned from all of this is that young women matter. They are our future. They will make history. 