

The Woodlands Show Chorus looks to win back-to-back titles at a cappella competition in Houston

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Director Betty Clipman, leads the members during a rehearsal of The Woodlands Show Chorus, held at First Presbyterian Church Monday, March 20, 2023 in Conroe. [Michael Wyke/Contributor](#)



With silver medallions around their necks and smiles on their faces, around 40 women gathered to sing ABBA, Miley Cyrus' "The Climb" and other hits — a cappella style — at the Conroe First Presbyterian Church.

In many ways, it looked like just another Monday gathering for **The Woodlands Show Chorus**, which has met for three hours each week since its inception in 2013. But the singing on March 13 also was the final rehearsal before the chorus heads to defend its title Thursday through Sunday at the Sweet Adelines Regional Convention in Houston.

The chorus is a member of Sweet Adelines, a 75-year-old women's chorus and quartet organization with 23,000 members that span across five continents. Sweet Adelines groups sing in a barbershop style, which focuses on harmonizing voices in four parts — lead, tenor, baritone and bass.

If **The Woodlands Show Chorus** wins the regional competition, they'll have a chance to earn a top 10 spot at the Sweet Adelines International Competition for the second year in a row. For a relatively new chorus, that's unheard of, member Denise Tazumi said.

"Scoring high and going to international, not only that, but making the top 10 is incredibly difficult to do. There's amazing talent in this organization," Tazumi said.

This is nothing new for Master Director Betty Clipman, however. A former singer in a family singers club and 40-year Sweet Adeline's member, Clipman has sung and coached for countless choruses and quartets, winning multiple international titles over the years.

Clipman said she accidentally became a chorus director but hasn't looked back since.

"To see these people who become your friends and watch them get announced as international champions, it just feels like the ultimate reward that I helped somebody achieve the greatest dream of their lives," Clipman said.

Clipman spends her weeks flying to New Zealand, Facetimeing quartets in Australia and coaching choruses from Dallas to London. But The Woodlands Chorus holds a special place in her heart.

A former coach in Washington, D.C. and with the Houston Horizon Chorus, Clipman retired and spent 15 "fabulous" years living by a golf course with her husband. After he died, Clipman was recruited by local singers to return to the industry — this time, to form a chorus of her own.

"(Clipman) is literally a rock star in this organization ... It doesn't matter how long you've been a sweet Adeline, you get to know Betty Clipman's name," Tazumi said. "So she still kept in contact with all of the people she knew for years here in Houston."

The Woodlands Show Chorus was born in a garage in 2012, Tazumi, a charter member, said. By 2014, the chorus reached their first international competition, competing against seasoned groups that were often 40 or 50 years their senior. In 2016, the chorus cracked the top 10, placing ninth.

Then came COVID. The chorus continued to rehearse via Zoom, but the allure of singing with a group was gone. Many choruses folded, and the once-80-member group dipped to fewer than 40 members.

"We were stuck in our houses, and it was very different because we couldn't sing together. It was difficult," member Jordan Sanders said. "When we could finally sing together again, it was masks and 6 feet apart and keeping each other separate. But I was just happy to sing again."

For two years, Sweet Adelines competitions were postponed. When they finally returned in 2022, **The Woodlands Show Chorus** returned to the international competition and earned their second ninth-place title.

"It was such a transition to get back to where we could sing together on the risers," Tazumi said. "The fact that we made the top 10, that was our goal this past year and we were so excited and thrilled that we did it."

New members have also begun to join the group. While it's an all-ages chorus, Sanders was by far the youngest member of the group when she started at 12.

Sanders decided she would try out on a whim, partially as a surprise to her neighbor, Master Director Clipman.

Now 18, she's become an integral part of the chorus and is a member of one of the group's two quartets. She's also no longer the only younger face in the room.

"It took them a little bit to kind of get used to the eccentric 12-year-old running around, but they warmed up to me pretty quickly," Jordan said. "I do kind of think me joining helped in the aspect of younger people seeing that they could join and it wasn't something impossible for them to do."

Now with COVID restrictions lifted, the chorus continues to be what it's always been — a place to escape the duties of jobs and families and put themselves first, if only for three hours a week.

"It's been my therapy. Raising my family, and with my husband gone a lot with his work, I knew that every week, I had my rehearsal and it was just mine," Tazumi said. "It's my joy. I don't know what my life would be like without it."

The Woodlands Show Chorus has become a well-known group in the North Houston area. The group performed at the Greater Conroe Arts Show Saturday morning and will head to The Woodlands to sing at the Ironman competition April 22, among other annual events.

"We've never had support like this in all the years I've been a Sweet Adeline," Clipman said. "Up here, they've embraced us from the beginning."

For now, Clipman and the chorus will be laser-focused on their next task — belting ballads, barbershop style, alongside choruses from Dallas, Houston and the rest of the south in hopes of earning a back-to-back international berth.

The Woodlands Show Chorus will compete at the **Sweet Adelines Region 10 Competition** Thursday through Sunday at the Hilton Houston North.

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