

WHEATON QUARTERLY

A magazine for the Wheaton community



Noting 25 years of coeducation

Spring / Summer 2014 by Quarterly

Gentlemen Callers' concert, events mark anniversary

On a cold, rainy night in March, 55 Gentlemen Callers marched one by one into Cole Memorial Chapel to the theme from *Superman*. They ascended the stairs and stood in the sanctuary, bathed in the glow of red and orange lights, as an enthusiastic crowd of more than 300 friends, family, students, alums, and current and former administrators and faculty members warmly embraced them with wild applause—even before one sweet a cappella note was released.



It was a fittingly dramatic start to a concert celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Gentlemen Callers (GCs) and 25 years of coeducation at Wheaton.

The GC Reunion Weekend, featuring a Friday night dinner and the Saturday concert, reunited 55 past and current GCs from the classes of 1992 to 2017. It was one of many events held this academic year commemorating coeducation at the college.

Not only did the GCs pay tribute to the college's past, but they also looked to its future by announcing that the Gentlemen Callers Alumni Union has raised \$70,000 of its \$100,000 goal for an endowment fund. The endowment will underwrite CD recordings and voice lesson stipends for students, networking events for alumni and, eventually, provide scholarship support.

Austin Simko '09, cofounder of the GCs union (with Alexander Grover '09), played a major role in establishing the endowment.

"The reunion weekend was a fitting tribute to coeducation because it truly embodied Wheaton's approach over the past 25 years of honoring college traditions while also keeping an eye toward what's next," said Simko. "We honored Wheaton's traditions by recognizing the role that the Whims and Wheatones played in founding the GCs, by giving thanks to our founding alumni, and by reconnecting with

Reflection

Jane Martin '74 and Jason Petty '92

"Men of '92"

Many years ago in Norton
There was quite a stir
For a college was to open
Not for him but her.

Women came from near and far
To learn and grow and give
To study and to party
Abundantly to live.

Then one bright September morning
Nineteen eighty-eight
Men arrived at Wheaton College
Students, not just dates.

Joining years of Wheaton women
Come the Wheaton men
With no easy act to follow
If we try we can.

Here we stand the men of Wheaton
Proud and brave and few
We think once you know us
You'll find we're just like you.

Even though we're small in rank
We've only just begun
We join you Eliza's daughters
We're Eliza's sons.

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Cornelia Lee Clifford Wareham '74

Learning specialist, the Chapin School, New York Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center ... [More »](#)

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the historic places—Mary Lyon and Cole chapel—that have hosted Wheaton voices and songs for more than a century.”

The GCs were the first and—still are—the only all-male a cappella group at Wheaton. The group was founded in 1988 by a small group of the new male undergraduates, who became known as the Men of 1992, their year of graduation. They also became symbolic of the historic transition from an all-women’s college to a coed one.

Wheaton was founded in 1834 as a female seminary and chartered as a four-year liberal arts college in 1912. The college became coeducational in 1988, after more than 150 years as a female-only institution, to address declining enrollment and competition from coeducational colleges in the region.

Since the first coeducational class enrolled at Wheaton in September of that year, enrollment has more than doubled, and the number of applications for admission submitted each year has increased at an even greater rate, according to President Ronald A. Crutcher.

“It is remarkable how much our community has accomplished in that time span,” said Crutcher.

But the decision was a controversial one that to this day draws criticism from some alums—a fact that Mark McKone-Sweet ’92 pointed out during the concert in his brief presentation on the history of the GCs. While saying that not everyone was happy to have men on campus, he acknowledged the many who welcomed them and helped the group get started.

McKone-Sweet especially thanked members of the Whims and the Wheatones, Wheaton’s all-female a cappella groups. He invited three members of the Whims and Wheatones—Doreen Cummings ’94 (Whims), Nicole Mitchell Russell ’95 (Whims), and Sara Smith ’90 (Wheatones)—to the stage, and the GCs voted them in as honorary members.

Megan Russell-Witalis ’90 was a member of the Whims from 1986–90. As a junior, living in one of the new coed dorms, she described the atmosphere on campus in the fall of 1988 as “a bit tension-filled.” She said the women of Wheaton were “holding our breaths,” and were curious about what type of male students would appear on campus.

She recalled a senior, Kristen Shea, coming to a Whims rehearsal early in the fall of 1988 and telling the group that she had been approached by a senior of the other a cappella group, the Wheatones, about “helping some freshmen guys” start a group.

“We were actually impressed that so quickly there would be a group of guys interested in a cappella music, so we agreed as a group to help in any way we could,” Russell-Witalis said. “We helped with their auditions and song selections, and loved the name ‘Gentlemen Callers,’ since having a ‘caller in the parlor’ was what you would hear over the dorm intercom if a boy came to visit you.”

“Performing with them was a lot of fun,” she said.

“They brought a new vitality to campus, and I personally became very good friends with several of them. I think they actually became the poster boys for Wheaton coeducation because it took longer for the male athletics program to really develop and be successful.”

During the Saturday evening concert, the GCs sang many favorites,

including “Cecilia,” while many of their young children lined the stage to watch. And Andres Tejada ’97 brought the crowd to its feet when he sang lead on “Angel,” first in Spanish and then in English.

The decision:

In January of 1987, Wheaton trustees recommended, in principle, that the women’s college open its doors to young men in an effort to increase enrollment and compete with other coeducational institutions. After several months of discussion among alumnae, parents and friends, the board approved the move in May of that year. Wheaton’s first coeducational class—324 women and 74 men—arrived on campus in September 1988. Today, Wheaton’s population of 1,600 students is 65 percent women and 35 percent men.

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President Ronald A. Crutcher, Senior Associate Dean Jack Kuszaj and former dean Sue Alexander join the group on stage to sing “Men of ’92.” Alexander was instrumental in forming the GCs, and she cowrote the song.

Former dean Sue Alexander, who was instrumental in putting together the GCs, attended the concert. She, along with President Crutcher and Senior Associate Dean Jack Kuszaj, were invited up to sing with the GCs' "Men of '92," which Alexander cowrote with former assistant director of student activities Kristen Renn.

For the special occasion, Alexander wrote an extra verse to the song and emailed it to the men via their Facebook accounts. The GCs whipped out their Smartphones to read the words as they sang, because it was so new:

*Many years have passed at Wheaton
Since we heard her call.*

*Now we're husbands, partners, fathers,
Some of us are bald.*

*Tho' we've gone beyond the Bubble
We'll come back again,
For we know our years at Wheaton
Made us better men.*



Alexander Grover '09 presents flowers to former members of the Whims and Wheatones Doreen Cummings '94, Nicole Mitchell Russell '95 and Sara Smith '90, to thank the groups for their support of the GCs.

GC alumni traveled to campus from around New England, New York, Washington, D.C., Florida and even from Hawaii to attend the weekend. And once the concert was over, no one seemed to want to let go of the moment. More than 30 minutes after the concert had ended, groups of audience members lingered—talking, laughing and hugging.

"Coeducation in some ways was about creating a new community to propel an already prestigious Wheaton into the future," said Grover.

"Over the years, the GCs have created their own community within Wheaton—performing on and off campus—to instill a cohesive and fun feeling to events, making the transition and representation of coeducation a vibrant concept. I was proud of the GCs the night of the concert. And I'll never forget the appreciation I felt for the group and Wheaton when I saw such enjoyment in the faces of the guys on stage and the audience members."

More online:

Photo gallery and audio clips of the Gentlemen Callers' concert.

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