

# In the key of everyone

By Susan Brink, L.A. Times Staff Writer  
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It's difficult — in the United States in the 21st century — to find a group that meets with no other goal than the joy of community singing.

People who live in Ireland or parts of Europe can go to the pub and reasonably expect song to break out. In Africa, singing and dancing are everywhere. Hospitals, hotels and businesses have employer-based choral groups. Villagers in developing nations around the globe sing together

But here, recreational singing — that is, singing without formal training and without tryouts that exclude the less tuneful — is rare. Churches need singers, but even among those that don't demand tryouts, there can be congregation-wide pressure that they sound good. All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, for example, has two adult choirs whose singers must pass an audition. (When they're off for the summer, another choir, which sings in July and August, is open to all comers.)

Karaoke bars might provide an outlet — but if religion or drinking are eliminated from the search for community singing, there truly is not much left.

But a movement that began in Canada is inching its way southward into half a dozen states, including California. From the aptly named Everyone Can Sing Choir in Arkansas to the Raise Your Voices chorus in Massachusetts and the Common Ground Chorus in Virginia, the groups follow the philosophy of Canadian Shivon Robinsong, who began the Gettin' Higher Choir, in 1996 in Vancouver, British Columbia ([www.gettinhigherchoir.ca](http://www.gettinhigherchoir.ca)).

Phrases on its website include "come as you are choir" and "no audition, no vocal experience required." It is not identified with any particular religion or spiritual path.

Here in Los Angeles, Maggie Wheeler and Emile Hassan Dyer have adopted the same ideals as the Canadian choir. Their fledgling group, the Golden Bridge Community Choir, began this winter and meets in Hollywood. "We share music in the oral tradition," says Wheeler. "Everyone is welcome."

The group meets every Sunday at 11:30 a.m. at Golden Bridge Yoga in Hollywood. A second session of no-audition- required practice began April 22. (Fee is \$12 for drop-in or \$120 for a 12-week session.)

For Wheeler, the first session was a smashing success. "I've seen a lot even in a short time," she says, having just shown off her rookies in their first benefit concert on April 1. "People come, they start out timid and veiled," she says. "In these 12 weeks, a lot of the masks have fallen away. There is a tremendous energy arising from singing."

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