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

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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