



# SINGING ALONG

*Performing show-stopping tunes for Katy senior citizens*

Written by Jody Lane | Photography by Suzi Issa

**A**rmed with whimsical costumes and a love of singing, the members of One A-Chord are on a mission to make Katy's senior citizens laugh, remember the good old days, and know they aren't forgotten. The singing group seems to hit that mark with poignant accuracy. "We were at Autumn Grove Cottage nursing home, and a gentleman stood up after the performance," shares Gail Shipley, One A-Chord's music director. "He told us how much he'd thoroughly enjoyed the music and how much he appreciated that we'd come and made this day so special."

## *Spreading Smiles and Cheer*

Founded in 1995 as a small choral group that visited nursing homes twice monthly, One A-Chord has since grown into an interdenominational performance ministry represented by more than 70 men and women from over 10 churches. On Monday mornings from October through May, the troupe travels to 26 Katy and West Houston nursing homes, Alzheimer's centers, and assisted living communities, entertaining residents and spreading smiles.

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## *with* ONE A-CHORD

For all the changes in One A-Chord's leadership and format, one thing has remained constant over the years: Those who participate insist it's one of the most fun and rewarding things they've ever done.

Shipley became the group's music director in 2004 and was inspired by her father, who loved music and suffered from Alzheimer's in his later years. Shipley had often sung at the home he lived at and noticed how much the residents enjoyed live music. That's when the idea for doing a variety show for the elderly emerged.

"I wanted to do a Lawrence Welk-type show," she explains. "One A-Chord had about 20 members then and we gradually

moved from being a choir to putting on a show. So many of the people in the group love to dance and get into costume, and it makes the experience so much more vivid and interesting than a choir concert."

### *Hamming It Up*

Every year, One A-Chord members practice and perform new music for their thoughtfully honed format. In December, the program switches gears into more of a talent show, with members performing duets, trios, skits, and instrumentals. Practice begins in early August at St. Peter's United Methodist Church, and in October, the ministry begins touring.



*Mills remembers the time when a man who sat blankly throughout the performance, enthusiastically got to his feet during the salute to the Armed Forces. His wife told her afterwards he hadn't done that in a long time, and that as an Air Force veteran, he had, at 17, survived the Bataan Death March in World War II.*

“The residents love lively music,” Shipley says. “They love familiar tunes they knew in their day. Some of them know the words better than we do.” Programs are peppered with a variety of spiritual songs, hits from the 1910s through 1950s, and Broadway standards from shows like *Oklahoma*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, and *South Pacific*.

Other crowd-pleasers include patriotic songs, and One A-Chord members make sure to always do a salute to the Armed Forces in each performance. “Those whose families were in the military stand or raise their hands,” explains Shipley. She notes that even though the program is different each season, a few things are set in stone. “We always begin the show with “God Bless America” and a prayer, and Elvis always makes an appearance in some form, in one of the 40 songs,” she shares. “The ladies scream and ham it up.”

“We’re all a bunch of hams,” assures Bill Ramp, who line dances and jitterbugs with his wife Linda before Elvis comes out. They’re 14-year veterans of One A-Chord, first getting involved when Linda joined as a flautist.

### ***Memories and Laughter***

Jackie Mills, the group’s historian and chaplain, joined the same year as the Ramps. Mills had just moved to Katy from West Texas, where she was in a women’s Bible study group. “They called me ‘Squirt,’ and I missed them like crazy,” she says. “I saw an announcement about One A-Chord in the (church) bulletin that read, ‘If you have a love for the elderly, come see us.’ It was exactly what I was looking for.”

Her life has been touched by many special people along the way, like the woman with Alzheimer’s who toured with Bob Hope and the USO and who always sings along with One A-Chord. And the little lady in the audience with the towel on her head, who once told Mills, “I was in the beauty shop and I wouldn’t let them put the dryer on my head, ‘cause I heard ‘Chattanooga Choo Choo.’” “You know you’re doing something special,” shares Mills about the reason she performs with One A-Chord. “You want to be a part of something deeper.” **KM**

*JODY LANE enjoys writing and spending time with family and friends. She lost count of how often she heard the word “fun” while conducting interviews for this article.*



One A-Chord members bop to the songs of the 1950s



Diana performs “Singing in the Rain” with back-up from her fellow One A-Chord members



Along with sensational singers, One A-Chord has many talented musicians who play a variety of instruments



Dancing the Charleston to some 1920s ragtime music