



sing, sing a song

ALL-GIRL CHOIRS ARE LIVING OUT LOUD

FORGET THE CHAMBER music and *Sister Act* visuals—London's fierce female Gaggle choir isn't your traditional singing ensemble. In leggings, colorful tunics, and shiny hoods, the 22-member group took the stage at London's Field Day Festival in August and treated the audience to singing, chanting, and stomping to choruses like "I like cigarettes; I like guitars" and "I'm a drunk." And they're not the only group of girls taking choir singing outside the church. All-female alt-choirs from the U.K. to Montreal to California are hitting bars and clubs with a vengeance, singing original arrangements and covering indie artists such as Tom Waits and Björk.

"We sing on the off beat à la ska and cackle like witches or ominous birds," says Gaggle member KiKi (each of the Gaggles goes by a stage name, keeping their "real identities" secret). "It's not about being pretty or being pitch-perfect singers," she explains, "it's about getting the emotional core of the songs out." Since its formation

in 2008, Gaggle and its raucous live performances have been gaining popularity and have even been featured in *NME* and on the BBC.

Like the Gaggle girls, the women of the L.A. Ladies Choir believe the benefits of singing in a group are more than meets the ear. "Our choir is about creating healing experiences," says 33-year-old cofounder Becky Stark. Best known for her other indie music projects, *Lavender Diamond* and the *Decemberists*, Stark started the choir in 2009 with the *Moonrats'* Aska Matsumiya, 25, in an effort to "strengthen feminine energy," she says. Sporting flowing, pastel dresses, the 18 Ladies perform both original compositions and covers, including a signature take on Yoko Ono's "Sisters O Sisters." "When all of these very independent women create this unified voice together, it just feels unstoppable," Matsumiya says. "Sharing that actually feels like a force for change."

The joy of creating something with a wide variety of women is another factor

that brings ladies into the fold. San Francisco's *Conspiracy of Venus*, founded in 2007, features 50 women who tackle six-part harmonies to songs like Rufus Wainwright's "Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk." Their choir brings together a larger cross-section of women, with singers ranging in age from their 20s to their 50s. "It's a wonderful mixture of perspectives," says founder Joyce McBride, 48. *Venus* member Frankie Burton, 24, adds, "Being one of the younger members, I am constantly learning from other members about singing, life, being a woman, being part of a community. The difference between this choir and other choirs is that it's like a second family."

And according to Stark, singing in an all-girl choir provides more than just membership within a growing phenomenon. "Singing with 20 or 30 people is so healing," she says. "It's really amazing to see how music is medicine that works. To me, it serves a practical purpose. I wish everyone would sing in a choir." [ERIN DEJESUS]