



THE PRINCETON NASSOONS
EST. 1941
SFC

HISTORY-BY-DECADE

The 1940s

The 1940s marked the birth of the Nassoons, as well as the death and rebirth due to World War Two. The original eight members came out of the Glee Club to introduce small-group a cappella singing to the Princeton campus. Their founding act initiated what has become, fifty years later, a bonafide singing group community and subculture which involves over a hundred undergraduates and innumerable fans.

The Nassoons' popularity was swift in coming. A year after their debut at Yale, the Nassoons were singing in the presence of Ella Fitzgerald and had a show booked in New York's posh Rainbow Room. By the decade's close, the group had lent their voices to the music of such 40s luminaries as Lester Lanin and Gertrude Lawrence. In the early years the Daily Princetonian spent much ink chronicling the group, announcing new members, new officers, and the dates of the group's performances at upcoming social engagements.

Though the Nassoons were still affiliated with the Glee Club, and performed when the Glee Club sang on campus, the group was not held back from performing on its own. Monday through Friday they practiced at 1:00 in Murray-Dodge Hall, getting ready for the growing list of shows that year. By August 1942 they had sung all over the East Coast and the South, at beach

clubs, hotels, prep schools, other colleges, and even army camps, not to mention the girl's schools, where they always warmly received.

A glowing campus news write-up bragged that the group was rapidly replacing the "decadent, timeworn" Whiffenpoofs as the premier east coast singing group. "The Smithenpoofs," it predicted, referring to the all-girl group at Smith, "would soon become the 'Lassoons.'" The Nassoons certainly had enough songs in the repertoire to fill an entire program. They even held a special spring concert on Friday, May 28, 1943, singing twenty-one songs on the steps of Blair Arch.

The repertoire contained many barbershop songs, spirituals, and the popular songs of the time, some of which were arranged in the unique five-part harmony that defined the group's sound. Selections from the Yale songbook, were the first numbers that J. Merrill Knapp, a former Whiffenpoof and Glee Club director, used to help the group get started. Several of these songs became Nassoon staples. One program from a November 1942 concert lists songs that the Nassoons were still performing in the 1980s--"Aba Daba Jungletown," " My Cutie's Due "--while others were more particular to their time: "Ich Armis Armis Teuflein," "How Did You Like LaRue's," and "Oh By Jingo."

In fall 1942 the Nassoons broadened their campus exposure by involving themselves with the Triangle Club. They performed in Time and Again while the sets were being changed behind the curtain, and also occasionally in the background during the bar and night club numbers. Among the songs they performed in the show were "Thank God They're Not Rationing You" and "As I Remember You."

But the celebrated life of the Nassoons came to an abrupt end in spring 1943, when, like many campus activities, the group disbanded because of World War II. Among their last achievements before disbanding was the release of their 1942 album of songs and their recording session with Gertrude Lawrence, a famed Broadway actress of the time, which was rebroadcast over the Armed Forces Network in 1943. As a symbol of their unity, the group wrote up a constitution, stating that the name "Nassoons" could not be used by any singing

group on campus unless at least four of the old Nassoons came back to try out people for the group.

In spring 1946, on the weekend of May 18, Nassoon alumni returned to campus, held auditions for new members, and revived the group after its three-year hiatus. During its first two years, the Nassoons were still connected to the Glee Club; but in September 1946, the Committee on Non-Athletic Organizations formally gave a charter to the Nassoons as an independent organization. The group, thereafter a "legal entity," was officially reborn. Practices were held in the basement of the Presbyterian Church on Nassau Street (not until 1949 did the group start using 100 1901 Hall).

Although also occupied with learning the old Nassoon songs, the postwar group concentrated its energy into the 1946 Triangle show, Clear the Track, the first show Triangle had performed since 1942's Time and Again. Since the Triangle show did not open until December 13, the Nassoons made their campus debut with the Glee Club on November 22, at Alexander Hall. Tickets were 60 cents. It was a double header for the group, since later that night they went to a dance held by the Daily Princetonian to sing a few more numbers, sharing the stage with Les Brown and his orchestra (1946's "Top Recording Band of the Year"), and Hank Durell's orchestra.

In January 1947, the group announced their plans for a March 7 recording session to cut their first album in five years. They picked as their recording technician Mary Howard, who had a month earlier had been cited by Time magazine for being at "the top of her profession." The release date was set for April 1947, and the price of the three-disc "limited edition" album was \$4.50. Advance orders were recommended. A barometer of the group's popularity was the February 1947 Daily Princetonian, which mentioned the Nassoons in two headlines and a third article, all on the same page. The album even had an eight-paragraph review in the May 1 issue of the Prince.

On November 14, 1947 the Nassoons sang with the Whiffenpoofs for the first time since the prewar disbanding. The two groups appeared together at the Prince-Tiger prom. The venue was the first held in the newly-completed Dillon

Gym, and two thousand people were expected to attend. Through the efforts of Jim Buck '46, the two groups played their first touch football game together on the morning of the varsity football game.

By 1948 the group was holding weekly informal sings on Sunday afternoon in the Nassau Inn. Outside of performances were hour-and-a-half practice sessions, five times a week, when the group practiced their 35-40 song repertoire and taught the arrangements to new members. Membership for prospective Nassoons was not guaranteed. These "probational" members had to shine during their first year with the group, or else they would not be officially taken into the group, and asked to leave. The group was also actively hosting other singing groups, such as the Mount Holyoke "V-Eights," who came to visit Tigertown in October 1948. But the Tigertones, a second campus singing group presence formed in 1946, were beginning to gain in popularity and quality. Although the Nassoons were picked to appear in the fall 1947 Triangle show, All in Favor, the Prince reported that they were in close contest with the Tigertones for the selection. But some traditions were already starting to take root: the Whiffenpoofs and the Nassoons once again met on the playing field for some touch football, this time up at Yale. Although the varsity team won that year, the 'Soons and the Whiffs battled to a scoreless tie.

The 1950s

During the 1950s the group began to build on their musical success by defining their identity. While setting roots to insure their continuation, they still kept alive the originality and creativity of their predecessors. The introduction of awards epitomize this reorientation. In 1952 Barry Phelps '53 founded the McKay School of Music Award, in 1952 came the Ford-Pickering Award, and in 1958 the group initiated the T.J. Johnson Award. The McKay Award symbolized the pride held for musical excellence, and extolled those who most exemplified the dedication to the music that Hamilton McKay '51 always expected from the group. The Ford-Pickering Award, on the other hand, was not necessarily related

to music. As its inscription reads, the award is given to "the most exemplary Nassoon" by the end of each year. The T. J. Johnson award is the opposite side of the same coin. It exemplified the member who had "done the Nassoons for the most": not being on time, not showing up for shows, not singing his part, not blending well. These three awards added new dynamics to the group by stressing and encouraging personality as much as musicality.

By 1951, albums were being released every other year. The group also switched to single 12" records (with room for many more songs) from long-playing 10" records or a set of three 78's. The records also included more extensive liner notes photographs than previous albums.

Now that the group was gaining a bit of history, cultivating and promoting the Nassoons extended beyond releasing an album. The current Nassoon logo of the four singing tigers was adopted from a drawing that appears on the 1949 album. Bill Blackburn '51, holding a summer job at a Chicago advertising firm in 1950, asked one of the staff illustrators to update the older cartoon for the 1951 album.

During the 1950s the Nassoons also began taking extended tours. From the beginning the group had gone all over the East Coast on Triangle tours and their own weekend jaunts. However, the group did not plan anything ambitious until 1951, when Barry Phelps arranged a week-long spring trip to the Bahamas. The trip triggered a southern migration every succeeding year. The first fall "tour" happened in 1953, when the group traveled to Toronto, Canada, to sing for the American Ambassador. But for the most part the group confined longer trips to the spring, alternating between Bermuda and Puerto Rico for most of the decade, and then Fort Lauderdale in 1958 followed by Jamaica in 1959.

But the most significant development for the Nassoons was a permanent home: 100 1901 Hall. The group started practicing there in the last year or two of the 1940s. Every practice was held there, the music of the group lived there; and the spirit of the group had a place to grow and be nurtured through the years. Phelps was responsible for getting a piano down in the room, further establishing 100 1901 Hall as the group's headquarters.

The Nassoons gained national exposure during the decade as well, even appearing twice on network television. One of the members, Peter Gott '57, was invited onto "Name That Tune," and the group followed in tow to sing a few numbers. *Life* magazine snapped a picture of the group for an issue spotlighting a wild, all-night Halloween party in New York. While enjoying their 1958 spring break in Fort Lauderdale, the wild antics of the group fit in perfectly with the still-developing college scene. In fact, the Nassoons left such an impression on the other vacationers that a writer researching his book *Where the Boys Are* included them in his account of the Florida hot spot (the book later became a hit film in the early Sixties). And touch football fever led one of the members to write *Sports Illustrated* about the *other* annual football game between Yale and Princeton. The result was a published letter in the fall 1959 issue, replete with a photo of the Nassoons in appropriate touch football regalia. Unfortunately the magazine also published the score of the game, which the Nassoons lost.

1879 arch was still the main concert venue for both the Nassoons and the Tigertones. After football games the two groups would race back to the arch to determine who would get to sing first in front of the football fans returning to campus from Palmer Stadium. In the late 1950s, the two groups sang together for a few peaceful moments during the Christmas season, when the singers would go through Princeton caroling together, eventually ending up at the house of the Dean of the Chapel.

As the decade drew to a close, the Nassoons could look back on the ten years and recognize the traditions they had helped to tailor. Their common experiences also gave rise to an esoteric language of memorable phrases and words. This tradition was born in the 1950s and has enjoyed a healthy life ever since. Many phrases have come and gone, but no one bit of slang has emerged every year to remain with the group through the ages as much as the granddaddy of group lingo, "SFC," coined in the late 1950s. Meaning many things to many people, those three letters have withstood time and tide to become the verbal trademark of the group.

The 1960s

The Nassoons balanced a sharp hindsight of the past with a keen eye towards the future during the 1960s. Whereas much of the 1940s and the 1950s were spent building a history, the group during the 1960s recognized its quarter-century of existence as a bonafide part of University life. Full-page audition ads in the 1965 *Princetonian* touted the importance of "tradition" as part of the Nassoon experience. On the walls of the 'Soon Room hung group photographs which stretched back to the 1940s. The original members of the Nassoons were now old enough to be the fathers of these 1960s Nassoons. Indeed, Bill Felch '42, watched as his son, Bill Felch, Jr. '71 joined the group in 1968.

But the Nassoons were not constrained by the traditions which they promoted. While the Fifties group had brought the Triangle song "East of the Sun" back into the repertoire and had given tribute to the Dean of Students, William Lippencott, with the bridge words, "Oh, Lippy," the Sixties group only three years later changed the words to "Oh, Lizzy" in reference to their sophomore member, George Lee Judy '64, whose nickname was "Lizard." And it was during the Sixties that the group added the key change and driving bass line to the group's most sacred song, "Perfidia."

In the 1960s, the repertoire expanded rapidly. Talented arrangers added folk songs and traditional Princeton songs as well as continuing to add current, though not rock n' roll, popular songs. This musical decision was largely due to the influence of Dick Peterson '60, who had a very strong opinion of what the repertoire should be, and forbade rock n' roll arrangements.

The Nassoon's five-part sound was included on the RCA album "Campus Hootenanny" which illustrates the different a cappella styles of that time. The "Hootenanny" was a Jamboree held at Brown University in fall 1963, and includes the Nassoons as well as a half-dozen other groups, some of which use guitar accompaniment. The idea of a Jamboree had taken hold among colleges, for good reason: it encouraged more groups to sing together on different campuses. The Nassoons soon held their first Jamboree, in 1966, with the

Vassar Night Owls, the Harvard Krockodiloes, the Cornell Cayuga's Waiters, and the Wellesley Widows.

The Nassoons also travelled during the Sixties with much the same enthusiasm as before. But members like business manager Rod Oppman '65 proved that the group could, indeed, be a business. The group followed the football team in the fall and sung at every nearby prep school, girl's school and college in the vicinity. Oppman's logistical tactics insured high album sales and a large number of shows. In 1964 the group was invited to the Greenbrier, a posh southern resort, to sing during the week leading to New Year's Day, where they returned each year until 1970.

The slang kept growing within the group and more traditions developed, some more distinguished than others, such as mooning on road trips and "pig piles" which grew out of an adaptation of Tiger Inn's "trees and trolls." By the early 1960s, winter and spring parties were a well-established practice of the Nassoons. The tradition of "aways" was also in full swing, which gave the group an opportunity to dress up the 'Soon Room in more style and add to their history. But a commitment to the group was expected from each member, which included being on time. In 1960 Rich McGlynn '60 began the practice of having the president wear a watch on each wrist, demonstrating the importance of punctuality, particularly from himself. Ever since then, the president has worn two watches in OJTs. Touch football continued to grow in the 1960s, and was canonized in the cover photograph of the 1965 Twenty-Fifth Anniversary album. By the end of the 1960s, touch football practice was held an hour before regular practices began.

It is in the 1960s that Nassoon reunions begin to happen on a regular basis. Mr. and Mrs. McMorris '66, parents of Mac McMorris '66, who lived in Princeton, opened their doors to the Nassoon alumni and undergrads during Princeton Reunions. It is because of them that the group has gotten to know each other, past and present, and have developed a familial relationship. Reunions at the McMorrises gave the current group a living sense of history, and the alumni members could reconnect with the undergraduates. For many

members, past and present, the 25th anniversary reunion, held at Charter Club in June 1964, was the first time they reunited with Nassoons from other generations of the group.

The 1970s

The 1970s were a time of revolution and change. The University had opened its doors to women in 1968, and in 1970 joined other colleges around the nation in their fear of student rebellion by closing down for a semester. The Nassoons of the Seventies, therefore, were born at a time of change. So it comes as little surprise that they were the ones responsible for defining a new tone and style of the group.

The 1972 album was delayed a year by the closing of the University and recorded in 1971. The album epitomized the tenor of the group in its liner notes: "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." Elements of the album: the "vintage" cover, the scratchy bit from the 1942 "Signature Song" opening the album, harkened to the past, while the addition of a guitar broke new ground.

The group also started a number of traditions. In 1973 the group added the Freshman swim meet, at the fountain of Woodrow Wilson School, to the agenda of the spring party. Then, directly afterward the group sang in 1879 arch in whatever condition they were in, which was often naked. But one of the major changes of the 1970s was that Freshmen were considered full members of the group, voiding the long-held practice of keeping the new members in provisional status until they had proven their merit after a year. The tradition of Sophomore mugs, usually a sign of official membership, now became a pewter gift that recalls the practice of old and congratulates the members of new.

Other more social aspects of the group continued to develop as well. For example, mooning enjoyed a renaissance of a sort never seen and yet to be matched. With the variety that were performed, it is not surprising that the group created an award for the best moonings of each year. Started in the early Seventies in honor of Bill "Bunz" Bennett (the first recipient), the award was still

being handed out by the early 1990s. With the sexual revolution, "Squads" were created: the V squad, being the first, was a proclamation of solidarity among those members still virgins. This squad was, in fact, so strong in numbers and so vocal that, to counter its call, other members formed a P squad. Another favorite activity within the group was creating alternate or "dirt" lyrics for some of the more popular songs in the repertoire.

The Nassoons also started taking more tours during the year as the university academic calendar allowed. Holding a practice week before returning to the campus in the fall started in the early 1970s giving the members of the group a chance to gather at the end of the summer for a week or so before submerging into the pressures of the academic year. The week also allowed the group to concentrate on warming up their voices and take time in whipping the repertoire back into shape.

The group may have stopped spending New Year's at the Greenbrier as they did in the 1960s, but by the 1970s the Nassoons had expanded their tour season to include intercession breaks. The Nassoon calendar had always been a major time commitment, with weekend jaunts, spring tours and seven-hour practice weeks. Nonetheless the group added a practice week and an intercession tour, not to mention the time devoted to touch football. In the 1970s the group continued to take its touch football very seriously, playing most every singing group they encountered during the fall in addition to the traditional Nassoon-Whiffenpoof game. Practice down in 1901 Hall would go from 4:30 to 6:00, every weekday; but TF practice in the fall would start an hour beforehand, in the courtyard of the Junior slums, and everyone was usually in attendance.

Princeton was also beginning to crowd with other singing groups all during the decade. The Tigertones and the Footnotes remained as before, but to the music group ranks rose the Tigerlilies in 1971, co-founded by the daughter of a Nassoon. Female voices now joined their male forebearers in the gothic arches. It was inevitable that a fifth music group would form, which mixed both male and female voices; but its co-founder and principle arranger, Peter Urquhart was still

an active member of the Nassoons when he helped to form the Katzenjammers, in 1973.

New generations of talented arrangers, including Urquhart and others, rose during the 1970s. The repertoire all of a sudden included Beatles songs, songs by the Grateful Dead, and what many point to be the centerpiece of the revival, the Beach Boys' "I Get Around." The Nassoons were now speaking to a new generation with a new generation of songs.

The presentation of these songs also changed. There grew to be an emphasis not only on musicality but also on showmanship and panache. Two new doo-wop numbers, "Blue Moon" and "Get a Job" introduced choreography into performances. Now the group was moving around, not just standing in a semi-circle and concentrating on blend. Announcements were beefed up and the group cracked jokes to the audience between shows. But the Nassoons kept their priorities straight: announcements were always secondary to music.

The 1980s

As the 1960s were a time for the group to fortify the traditions of the 1950s and reflect upon their history, so were the 1980s, when the Nassoons maintained the social and musical outlook inherited from the 1970s. Musically the group continued to modernize the group's sound, keeping intact the traditional five-part harmony. Many of the early 1980s arrangements spotlighted some memorable solos, such as "Moondance," "Takin' it to the Streets," and "On and On." And just as the 1960s groups also supplemented the newer songs with older folk songs and ballads, the 1980s groups had an influx of songs by artists from the 1930s and 1940s such as Irving Berlin, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker.

The decade began with two new singing groups--the Tigressions in 1980 and the Roaring 20 in 1983. Along with the Madrigals, which formed in the late-1970s, a cappella singing was growing larger and larger. With so many groups vying for new voices every semester, competition for good singers was intense. In addition to performing songs, the group began to refine their announcements,

sometimes preparing them days in advance, particularly for the Nassoon-Whiffenpoof Jamborees each fall. The announcements, when they were good, did much to win the hearts of their audiences; and when the Nassoons were performing in a weekly arch with seven other groups, winning over the audiences became increasingly important. Arches themselves lasted over two hours, despite a ten- to fifteen-minute limit for each of the eight groups.

Practice week, now called "warmup week," took on a new purpose, that of preparing the group against the other groups during Freshman Week in order to attract new members and groupies. Incoming freshmen saw all of the groups perform successively three or four times and could directly compare each of the groups against the others and decide their favorites. In this atmosphere, entertaining an audience was just as important as musicality and strength of performance. Announcements by the end of the decade took on the dimensions of full-blown comedy sketches and sometimes song parodies.

In fall 1984, riding the summer success of Prince's song, "When Doves Cry," Peter Sachner and a few other members wrote a parody version detailing the misadventures of a frustrated freshman. The song was so much of a hit that the next fall the group parodied Madonna's "Material World" and, in fall 1986, Peter Sachner and David Mehnert collaborated on Howard Jones' "No One is to Blame." Andrew Blau '90 revived the song parody tradition after a one-year hiatus with "Anything Goes." He and a few other members of the group collaborated on lyrics that poked fun of the social and academic life at Princeton. The Nassoons debuted the song in 1988 and sang it again the following year.

When the group gathered to record the 1986 album during the spring of 1985, they included "The Nassoon Rap" among the tracks. A fun, lighthearted rap song detailing the different voice parts of the Nassoons, and performed by Dave and Dan Hicks '86 with a three-bass back beat. The rap song epitomizes the major role that announcements were playing in the group by mid-decade and the desire of the group to keep up with the popular musical styles of the time. David Ogden '89 and Tim Gladden '89 continued the rap tradition for an announcement at the Yale Jamboree in fall 1986. In spring 1989 started working

on a new, more self-mocking rap song. Tom Clay '91 and Jason Matthews '91 together wrote and performed, with the basses, a third "Nassoon Rap." First performed during Freshman Week 1989, this rap was so popular not only with audiences but also with the group members that the rap lasted long past both Clay and Matthews, went through five or six different performers and was still being sung in 1993.

By the summer of 1990, the group was hungry both for a current song and a new song parody for Freshman Week. Eric MacGilvray '93 capitalized on the two needs by arranging the 1989 Disney song "Under the Sea." Its warm calypso style pleased audiences immediately--but it earned wider success when Eric wrote and debuted the parody lyrics in fall 1990. Retitled "Princeton is Free," the song was a witty send-up of Princeton and its financial requirements. Audiences reacted so positively to the parody version that the group ended up almost never singing the original lyrics. When the group recorded the song for the 1992 album, the parody lyrics were used. A medley of television songs entitled "TV Tunes" followed in fall 1991 and performed widely during the years to follow.

During the 1980s, to keep pace with technological changes in the music industry, the Nassoons introduced cassettes with the 1986 album and retired vinyl records with the compact disc recording of the 1990 album. Liner notes also changed in length to short, one or two paragraph blurbs explaining very briefly about the Nassoons.

The 1980s were a very prosperous decade for the country and for the Nassoons. In 1980 the parents of Stewart Harris '83 donated a white-and-orange car to the Nassoons, the first car the group ever officially owned. In spring 1983, Fred Koch, a rich New York socialite and arts patron hired the group to perform for a party he was throwing and paid the group twenty-five times their usual fee. Mr. Koch rehired the group on three more occasions. Through the generosity of Mr. Koch, the Nassoons were able to buy themselves a van in 1987, a much-needed resource for any singing group.

Tours also became much more upscale at the end of the Eighties and produced a four-year string of international, blockbuster trips. In spring 1989, the

Nassoons reactivated their association with the Greenbriar and returned to the West Virginia resort every warmup week from 1989 into the early 1990s. Clay arranged the first European tour for the Nassoons, in fall 1989, where the group performed in Germany and Switzerland. Clay kept the contacts alive enough for a second tour in fall 1990, expanding to include Austria and Italy. Album sales, incidentally, netted the group thousands of more dollars in revenue. One show earned the group over \$1500 in CD and cassette sales alone. In 1991 Stephen Miller '93 worked with non-Nassoon Ali Abunimah '93, a roommate of Peter Boodell's '93, to arrange the group's first Middle East tour to Jordan. Peter Boodell himself followed up the Jordan tour with, in 1992, a tour of Japan and Hong Kong.

The 1990s

The 1990s saw the Nassoons appear on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno, and tour Europe and the Americas. Talented arrangers added such songs as "Please", "Masquerade", and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow", to the repertoire. The group was featured in an issue of Harper's Bazaar when they happened upon the models' photo shoot while in their tuxes, and continued to sing all over the campus at arch sings and reunions.

The 2000s

Recent shows have brought the Nassoons to Los Angeles to entertain guests on NBC's Tonight Show with Jay Leno, to New York City to appear on the Early Show with Bryant Gumbel on CBS, and even to the White House at the request of former President and Mrs. Bill Clinton. The group now also tours internationally almost every year, most recently in Taiwan, the British Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.