

Quartet makes beautiful music together

By Rhonda Van Pelt

The four women have diverse backgrounds, but they all share a love for singing and for Manitou Springs.

Nancy Fortuin is retired from the Army; Sue Graham worked for Centura Health; Anne Rodgers is an artist and creative director for a greeting card company; and Jane Turnis is vice president of communications at Colorado College.

Together, they are Porch Song Trilogy.

It all started with a larger bunch of people who just enjoyed singing together. The other singers drifted away for other commitments, leaving the core to carry on.

"We shared some laughs, groans and an occasional 'ah-ha' moment of 'Why, that sounded pretty darn good!'" Rodgers said.

"Our mission became to lift the spirits of others by ringing doorbells and standing on porches to 'carol' people at any odd time of the year, calling ourselves the 'You-Never-Know-When-We'll-Show-Up-Singers,'" she added.

"We want people to experience the same joy we feel," Fortuin said.

They'll get puzzled looks from

people, along with smiles and, sometimes, tears. But the best part, they say, is when others join in the singing.

Graham and Rodgers have known each other since the 1980s, Fortuin and Graham met through the New Horizons Band about four years ago, and Turnis and Rodgers met when their sons became friends in 1999.

"(Anne and I) used to end up singing in each other's kitchens and swore one day we would actually create a group. I never thought it would really happen, but last year Anne said, 'This is it!' and we made it work," Turnis said.

They've all pursued music for years in various ways: Turnis sang to barn kittens at the Iowa farm where she grew up and now sings and plays guitar in an acoustic roots and folk trio; Rodgers admits to singing in the car and when she's feeling silly; Fortuin sang in high school and college groups; and Graham is a longtime musician.

"Sue and Nancy especially keep solid melodies and some harmonizing, Jane creates new harmonies that are amazing and I wander around between various harmonies," Rodgers said.

They get together two or three times a month, about three hours each time, to practice and hone their song list.

"We really enjoy practicing together and look forward to getting together. It's truly a social event — with wine involved — for us and we really enjoy it so much," Fortuin said.

They select familiar songs so onlookers can join in, and their repertoire ranges from Patsy Cline to



Courtesy photo

From left, Anne Rodgers, Jane Turnis, Nancy Fortuin and Sue Graham perform as Porch Song Trilogy.

the Beatles, folk to reggae, and "Sentimental Journey" to "The Long and Winding Road."

"We like songs that pull on a common emotion, that bring people together," Turnis said.

They love music from the 1950s to 1980s; Fortuin speculates that's because the songs imprinted themselves on their impressionable younger brains.

"We will try anything that someone suggests and depending on

our sound, effort to master and sometimes the message, we go with it or not," Graham said.

Currently, they're working on a program of "Love Songs for a Political Season," featuring positive songs of hope to get through the election campaigns.

Recent performances include the

opening reception of Green Horse Gallery's "Almost Like a Song" exhibit and at the Congregational Church's Oct. 1 "Connect" fundraiser, where attendees could bid on a Porch Song Trilogy performance in the live auction.

They've talked about adding some percussion instruments (Graham jokes about wearing sequined gowns), but most likely will stick with what's been working.

"The cool thing about a capella music is that you reach a point where the singers breathe together, move together and become intuitive to one another. It's like you're one entity, rather than four. It's magical," Turnis said.

For all four, singing provides a creative outlet and lets them be part of a group effort.

"Most people only sing at church or in the shower, so it's a bit of a risk to ask a few folks to get together just to sing. And it's a risk to accept such an invitation," Fortuin said.

"At first I felt so exposed and insecure. But it was such a rewarding, supportive and joyful experience, so I feel privileged to be part of the group."

Why are the arts so important to having a good life?

Rodgers has a list: "Helps us to dig deeper into emotions and see things we wouldn't otherwise. Relate and bond with others. Grow compassion."

Watch for Torch Song Trilogy this holiday season, singing with joy and gratitude around Manitou. Or you never know — they might show up on your front porch.

You reach a point where the singers breathe together.

— Jane Turnis

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