

# STYLE

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## On a high note



Designed to be welcoming to audience members of all ages, A House features live jazz and classical performances in addition to a cappella.

A capella sextet Jigsaw, below, performs monthly at A House.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



### STORE NOTES

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**TELEPHONE:** (02) 2778-8612  
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*A House cafe is the first performance venue in Taiwan dedicated to a cappella music*

BY CATHERINE SHU  
 STAFF REPORTER

**N**ew East District (東區) cafe A House was filled to capacity last Sunday evening, with all eyes on a cappella sextet Jigsaw.

A cappella started in Europe during the Baroque era, but Jigsaw has little in common with those singers of yore. The young and energetic group performed its own arrangements of pop songs like Green Day's *Wake Me Up When September Ends*. Tenor Ching Chen (陳青仕) took on hosting duties, at one point giving amused audience members an impromptu lesson in beatboxing, one of the vocal percussion styles a cappella groups use to keep time.

Jigsaw's singers range in age from 21 to 28 and include recent college graduates, an A House employee and a television host. The group, which rehearses in members' homes on weekends, represents the kinds of musicians that A House, which opened in June to promote a cappella music in a family-friendly environment, wants to reach.

"The atmosphere here is very relaxed. We get to interact with the audience more and we can tell they are enthusiastic," says Jigsaw baritone Johnson Wang (王存敬).

A House is operated by CJCHT, a footwear manufacturer that was named Wal-Mart's supplier of the year in 2008 and 2009.

The journey from shoes to singing isn't as unlikely as it seems: The founder of CJCHT, Clare Chen (陳鳳文), is a lifelong choral music fan. In 2000, Chen and a college classmate, Ray Chiu (朱元齋), founded Taiwan Choral Music Center (台灣合唱音樂中心). The non-profit group organizes the annual Taiwan International Contemporary A Cappella Festival (台灣國際重唱藝術節), which celebrates its 10th anniversary next month and is the largest event of its kind in this country.

A House was launched as an outgrowth of the festival and seeks to raise a cappella's profile.

"A cappella groups don't have a lot of performance opportunities [in Taiwan], but A House gives them a chance to perform, interact with an audience and develop a stage presence," says Chiu, a music professor at Shih Hsin University (世新大學).

A cappella is often associated with jazz, but music styles include pop, hip-hop and even heavy metal.

"A lot of people think 'oh, choral music, that's 20 people standing still on a stage singing.' But a cappella isn't like that," says Catherine Liu (劉沁如), A House's general manager and Chen's daughter.

A cappella groups are a high school and university mainstay in the US, where the popular soundtrack albums for hit TV musical comedy *Glee* feature covers of Journey's *Don't Stop Believing* and Kanye West's *Gold Digger*. In South Korea and Japan, pop groups and TV competitions have made a cappella part of mainstream entertainment, but singers in Taiwan have fewer opportunities for exposure, says Liu.

Outside of campus performances and Taiwan Choral Music Center events (in addition to the festival, a concert is organized each spring), a cappella groups perform on a freelance basis, entertaining at events such as Lunar New Year banquets and award ceremonies.

Liu hopes a cappella singers will consider A House their home base. A cappella groups make up more than half of the cafe's monthly performance roster, which also includes jazz combos and classical string trios. With its brightly lit, spacious interior and a drinks menu that includes chocolate Coke and Belgian beers, A House is designed to appeal to a wide age range.

"When we were preparing to open the cafe, we found that a lot of performers want this kind of venue," says Liu. "They don't really want to perform in concert halls or pubs and especially not in nightclubs where it's chaotic."

A House also hosts workshops, including a beatboxing class each month. Liu plans to eventually have singing workshops for all levels at the cafe, where employees — even those with no prior music experience — are members of an in-house a cappella group called A Singers.

"I think everyone can sing a cappella, as long as they have training," says Liu. "If you can talk, you can sing."



### World music

A House's cocktail list pays tribute to an international roster of popular a cappella groups that have performed at the cafe or Taiwan International Contemporary A Cappella Festival

### O-Kai Singers (歐開合聲團)

The members of O-Kai honor their Aboriginal heritage with jazz interpretations of traditional Atayal songs. O-Kai is currently on hiatus as two of its members are serving in the military, but fans can pay tribute to the group with a cocktail that combines Taiwanese millet liquor, whiskey, elderflower syrup and pineapple and lemon juice. On the Net: [www.okaisingers.com](http://www.okaisingers.com)

### Stouxingers

The German sextet mixes pop, jazz and R'n'B in their original songs and are known for quirky vocal effects, including their ability to mimic the sound of a didgeridoo. They are represented with a drink made from coffee liquor. On the Net: [www.stouxingers.de](http://www.stouxingers.de)

### Takarabune

An all-female group based in Kobe, Japan, Takarabune's musical influences include Latin, jazz, bossa nova and Japanese folk songs. Their namesake drink combines Japanese sake with perilla vodka. On the Net: [nest-acappella.com/Takarabune](http://nest-acappella.com/Takarabune)

### Vocal Six

The male singers of Swedish group Vocal Six are known for complex arrangements that give a new twist to pop and rock classics like the Beach Boys' *Good Vibrations* and the Beatles' *Hey Jude*. They are represented with a combination of Absolut Vanilia, lemon and cucumber

