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## All puckered up

### Impromptu whistle-off marks the start of Monrovia woman's trip to Tokyo competition

By [Liz Hedrick](#) 06/12/2008

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Though tempered by a bad cell-phone connection, Carole Anne Kaufman's whistled rendition of "Ave Maria" was awesome in its shrill but striking accuracy — not only due to the avian quality of the music, but because its unnaturally high frequency had the power to crack a windshield.

The 35 year-old Monrovia native will compete in the International Whistlers Convention's championships in Tokyo in July. A hair stylist, stand-up comedienne, ordained minister and self-proclaimed "lip balm-aholic," Kaufman added award-winning whistler to her array of titles six years ago after a friend suggested that she enter a local competition.

"At first I was excited about the idea, and I thought, 'maybe I'll do it,'" Kaufman recalled. "Later I wanted to back out, but I was too embarrassed to face my [hairdressing] clients if I didn't go through with it."

Kaufman tied for first place in that competition and has since placed first and second runner-up in the International Whistler's Convention's championships in 2005 and 2007, respectively. But more than her victories, Kaufman remembers these competitions for the people she met.

"It's like an underground community of whistlers — truckers, retired old ladies, even a Japanese teenager who gets so passionate that his body moves all over the place when he whistles," she said. "But really, they're just everyday normal people who want to bring whistling forth as a legitimate art form."

Kaufman and many of her fellow whistlers are disheartened by the common reference to whistling as a circus side-show act rather than a musical genre. (And don't even dare compare a whistler to a yodeler.)

While one may not need as much formal training to whistle — Kaufman herself has none — whistlers must have innate understandings of music, great lung capacities, correct breathing and nearly perfect pitch.

She also cites whistling as a deeply embedded aspect of many cultures. It has been, for instance, an integral part of certain African languages for centuries.

Added Allen de Hart, founder of the International Whistlers Convention (IWC), "Whistling still is the dominant language for groups of people living in the Pyrenees Mountains and the Canary Islands in Spain."

Not a whistler himself, de Hart became an avid whistle collector during his childhood on a farm in North

Carolina. “As a boy, I relied on whistles to corral sheep and cattle,” he said.

De Hart founded the IWC in 1970 as a way to make whistling competitions more formalized and, in turn, more legitimate. “It is not at all like ‘American Idol,’” he said. “There are two aspects of the competition — one for pop music and one for classical. And if a contestant is from a non-western country, their classical selection must come from that region.”

Until this year, the IWC championships have been held annually in Louisburg, NC. Both de Hart and Kaufman are thrilled that Japan has agreed to host the 2008 convention because they believe that branching out of North Carolina will solidify the international connections among whistlers.

“Ideally it will be hosted in the United States every other year,” said de Hart, who will not be accompanying Kaufman to Tokyo this summer.

Nat Nehdar, former chair of the Pasadena Human Relations Commission, believes that an international whistling competition has profound significance that transcends Kaufman’s underground whistling community.

“I think it’s wonderful that a Pasadena whistler is going abroad,” Nehdar said. “Music is the international language of love and harmony, and I believe that people should strive to come together through music.”

Nehdar, a (not so) closet whistler himself, then asked the Pasadena Weekly editorial staff to request a song for him to whistle. Settling on George Gershwin’s “Summertime,” — the same tune that Kaufman will whistle in Tokyo — reporters, editors and advertising representatives all listened in rapture as Nehdar’s vibrato (created through rapid tongue movements against the whistler’s puckered lips, apparently) reverberated throughout the office.

“Whistling gives me joy,” Nehdar said simply. “And it makes me want to share my joy with others.” In the minutes that followed his impromptu concert, a sense of ease and relaxation could be felt in the newspaper office in Old Pasadena. Gang violence, tax fraud, pedophilia — it all seemed less important for that moment.

Then it was Kaufman’s turn to spread some inner joy with her version of the same tune. Kaufman’s style is a little different from Nehdar’s. Before puckering up, she requested a moment to drink some water and reapply her lip balm, while Nehdar prefers a completely natural approach. “I believe that whistling comes from within,” Nehdar said. “There’s nothing you can put on the outside that will make you a better whistler.”

Whether Kaufman’s “whistle” is more a reflection of her innate spirit or highly effective lip balm is yet to be determined, but her skill is not in question. Though both Kaufman and Nehdar’s versions of Gershwin’s melody drew crowds, Kaufman whistled in an octave that could awaken sleeping dogs in Tokyo — perhaps explaining why she has only a cat as a pet.

In July, Kaufman will be joined by 11 other American competitors, only one of whom is also female. This uneven split among the sexes is not unusual in the whistling world.

“There are almost always more men in the competitions than women,” said Kaufman. “There’s so much sexism in whistling because many people think it’s not OK for women to whistle — to draw attention to themselves.”

De Hart agreed, reciting an old Southern saw: “A whistling woman and a crowing hen — both will come to no good end.”

Part of de Hart’s incentive to form the IWC was to give female whistlers a formalized venue in which to showcase their talent.

To assure her passage to Japan, Kaufman will be hosting a fund-raising party June 28 at LA PartyWorks in Monrovia. Admission is \$10 and includes entertainment — Eddie Haskell and His Sound and Vision Tribe —

food and drink.

And, of course, Kaufman will whistle — an auditory experience that’s well worth the cover charge.

*For more information on Kaufman, her fundraiser or to purchase her CD, visit [www.westcoastwhistler.com](http://www.westcoastwhistler.com).*

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