

The Kroks and Pitches: Singing it 'a Cappella'

**"Do-n-do-bah, do-n-do-bah,
Do-n-do-bah, do-n...
Well, you lace up your boots
And you walk on down
To a knock down shack
On the edge of town.
There's a Latin beatin'
combo
And they just won't quit.
Keep a-walkin' 'til you see
A blue light lit.
Fall in there, and you dig
them sights
Down at the house, house
The house of blue lights."**

By PARIS K.C. BARCLAY

"As a freshman, everything at Harvard has that traditional, venerated feeling about it; it's all been around for 300 years," noted Peter Lerangis, now the director of the Harvard Krokodiloes. "I remember the first time I heard the Glee Club, and the sound was really rich and impressive, but still very, very Harvard. I walked back into the Yard and there were the Kroks—like wandering street singers. They were enjoying the audience response, working well together, and producing quality music. I was blown away."

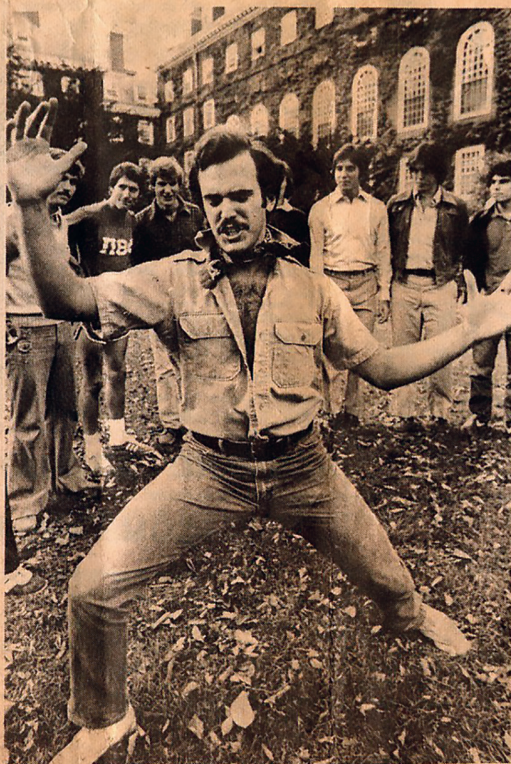
Since the middle of this century Krokodiloes have been doing exactly that—and much more. This all-male a cappella chorus has recorded numerous record albums, has flown for the past three years to perform in Bermuda, has traveled widely in the New England area, and, in the '60's, ventured as far as India. Their annual schedule has included as many as 100 concerts.

**"He blows eight-to-the-bar
In boogie rhythm.
Can't play a note unless
A bass and guitars playin'
with him.
And...the company jumps
When he plays 'Reveille',
He's the boogie woogie
bugle boy
From Company B."**

"No one but a couple of freshmen could have started this group," Cathy Manning explained, referring to herself and Diane Nabatoff who organized the Radcliffe Pitches about two years ago. "Nobody else would want to take on this kind of incredible work and responsibility."

For Cathy and Diane, the work has paid off. Their dedication, along with the help of a few Krokodiloes (Peter Rodgers, Jim Volling, and Peter Mansfield in particular) has resulted in an all-female counterpart to the Kroks, which, in its brief existence, has begun to cultivate the kind of support, quality, enthusiasm, and style that make a long, healthy future probable.

The Harvard Krokodiloes and the Radcliffe Pitches are, in normal years, the college's most selective vocal groups. In terms of sheer odds, one is much more likely to be accepted at Harvard, to be admitted to a freshman seminar, or to find a place in English C than to squeeze into a vacancy in either of these close-harmony groups. Last year, however, was an exception for the Kroks since there was only one returning veteran (due largely to graduation). There were a dozen vacancies where there are usually at most four or five.



1) The Harvard Krokodiloes, featuring Peter Lerangis as Elvis; and (2) the Radcliffe Pitches in concert.

"Krokodilo" is a Greek word which, surprisingly enough, means crocodile. The "Krokodilo" came into existence shortly after World War II as a single officer of the Hasty Pudding Club who was responsible for performing jokes, stories, and songs at their dinners. Before long it became a quartet, and by the '50's there were 12 members, all exclusively belonging to the Pudding as well. In the school year 1969-70, however, a black student named Lenny Easter was accepted into the group on the basis of superior musical ability, even though he did not belong to the Pudding. Soon he became the group's director and began accepting members from all over the college community. The constant turnover from graduations quickly altered the character of the Kroks; what was once a private club's informal entertainment had grown into an immensely popular group that could successfully combine musical precision with a casual, congenial stage presence.

**"He'd have to get under,
Get out and get under
(Get underneath)
To fix his little machine—
He was just dying to cuddle
his queen
(That classy lass)
But ev'ry minute
(Don't take no sass)
When he'd begin it..."**

The Pitches have no such tradition to fall back on, but hope to cultivate the same support among the community as the Kroks have done. It is not an easy goal by any means; for example, while both groups were invited to stay after the official close of school to entertain during Reunion Week, the Kroks had all their meals paid for by the College while the Pitches were forced to fend for themselves. Although Manning regrets that "there is not much support for this sort of thing within the university [administration] itself," she is optimistic. "The fact that we survived last year is

very encouraging."

Like the Harvard football team, both groups return to the area before registration for intense rehearsal—three sessions a day, every day. The Kroks met on Cape Cod around the 15th of September and the Pitches gathered on campus on the 20th. Both leaders cite the high degree of dedication and enthusiasm of their groups. In fact, the application of those qualities has aided the Kroks in learning nearly 40 songs—without a single sheet of music.

**"Somewhere over the rain-
bow
Skies are blue.
And the dreams that you
dare to dream
Really do come true."**

Comparisons between the Kroks and the Pitches are inevitable. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is a song arranged initially for the Kroks and now performed by both groups. The sound is markedly different. The female voices, as one would expect, are high and pleasingly smooth, but do not carry as well. The greatest contrasts in the Pitches' rendition are tempo changes, particularly in the last verse, markedly faster than the previous ones. The Krokodiloes perform the song with equal smoothness but with an emphasis on dynamic rather than tempo contrasts.

While these changes may seem minor, they reflect the preferences of the directors and indicate that the Pitches, after much help from the Kroks, are now learning to walk on their own feet.

"At some point we had to break away," Lerangis explained. "We didn't want to intrude on their progress. They did sing very successfully at Sanders last year."

"There have been some tense feelings between the groups," Manning pointed out, "but that's perfectly natural. We don't want to be the Kroks' little sister."

Both groups depend heavily on the community and friends for support. To keep adrenalin up during a concert, the



Photo: Sylvia Komatsu

Kroks rely heavily on the response they can get from an audience. The Pitches as well, particularly when performing a standard like "Bogie Woogie Bugle Boy," cannot help but to loosen up and enjoy the reciprocal flow of positive feelings. Unlike the earlier days of the Kroks, when business managers like David Rockefeller (who also plays bongos on an early Krok album) arranged group-financed trips anywhere in the world, the choruses now sing where they are invited, whenever feasible, for expenses and a small fee. For the first time this year, Leverett House will host the Kroks and the Pitches (and groups from Brown and Williams) singing together in late October. The Pitches, who are coordinating the concert, are hoping for a financial success that will set them on surer ground.

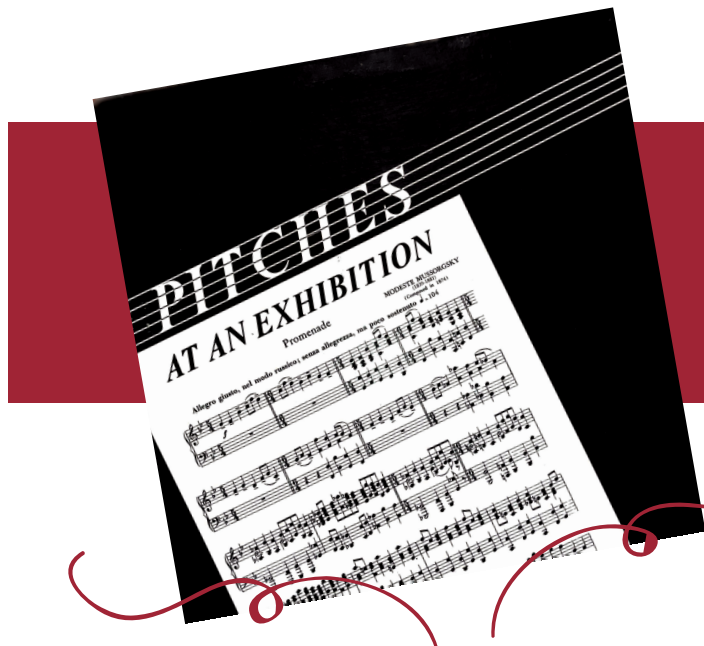
It is surprising that so little attention is paid to these two groups by the press; the perennial Sanders Theater concert (which fills the hall) is usually ignored outside of notice columns. The quality of the vocalists is unusually high, and yet they are not always taken seriously.

**"Sometimes I'm happy,
sometimes I'm blue."**

After selecting new singers in February after a full week of trials, there are spring and then late summer pre-seasons of rehearsals, and finally a daily rehearsal schedule; it is not surprising that beautiful music should result, as well as a very close companionship among the members that every audience immediately senses.

This year, with a virtually new set of Krokodiloes, and with the Pitches working their way into a solid repertoire and reputation, it is a perfect time for Harvard to sit up and take notice, as the freshmen do each year following the Glee Club concert. After all, they have just begun to sing.

The Krokodiloes and Pitches will perform in concert at Leverett House on Friday, October 29.



PITCHES AT AN EXHIBITION

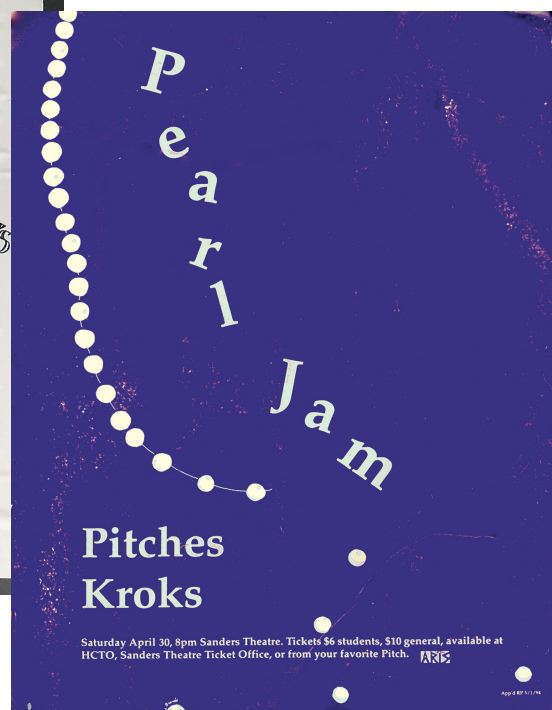
The Pitches' first jam at Sanders Theater took place on April 17, 1976. (If you'd like to hear an audio recording of that performance, visit <http://tiny.cc/Pitches76>) Since then, we've had the opportunity to grace the Sanders stage time and time again. And as you can see from some of the posters below, there's nothing we love more than a good pun when naming our jams!



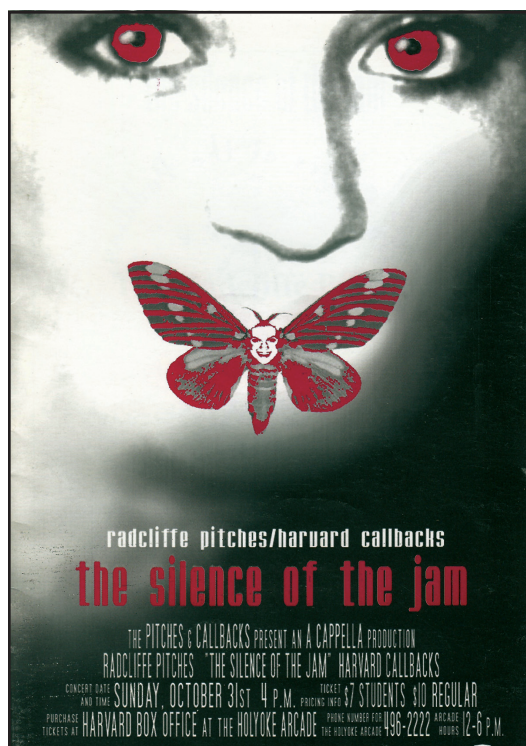
March 3, 1984



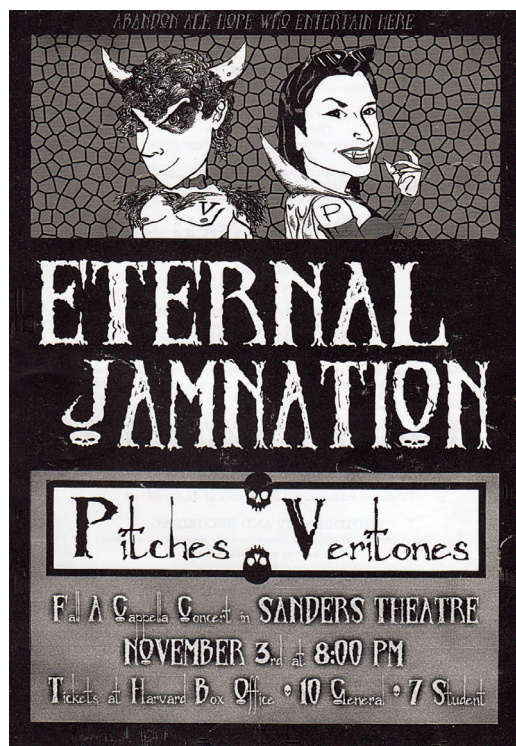
June 6, 1984



April 30, 1994



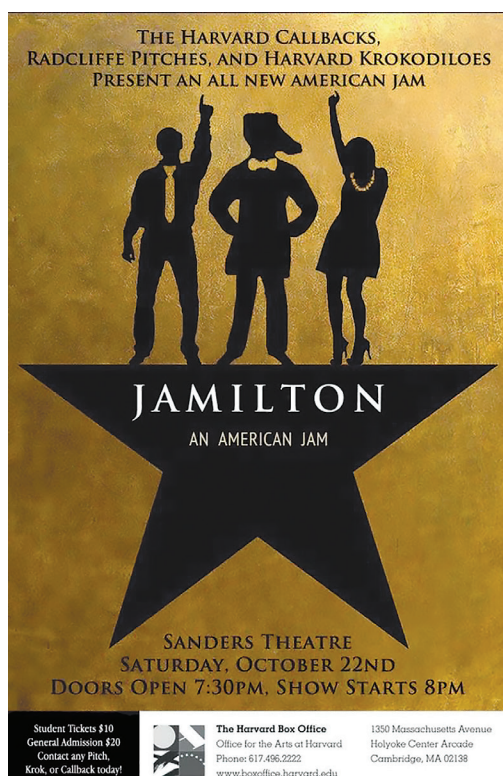
October 31, 1999



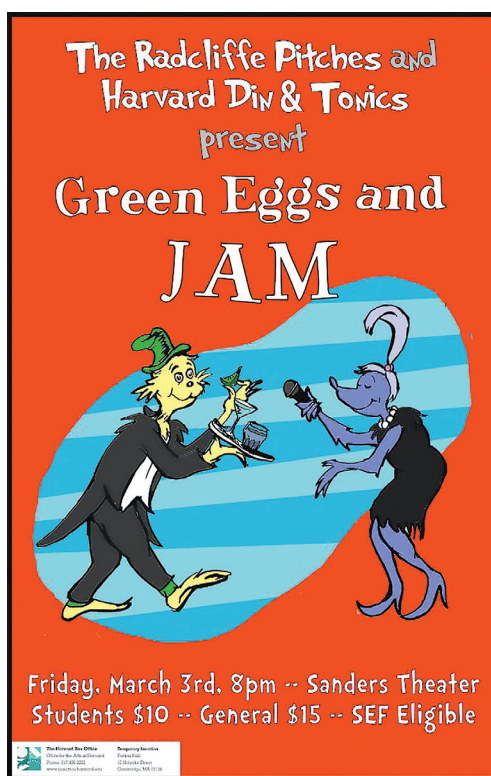
November 3, 2000



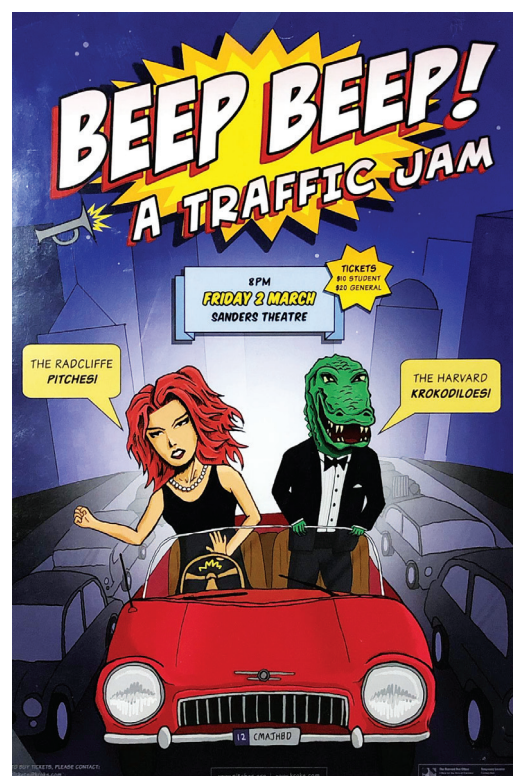
October 30, 2015



October 22, 2016



March 3, 2017



March 20, 2018

The Radcliffe Pitches

June

Fire



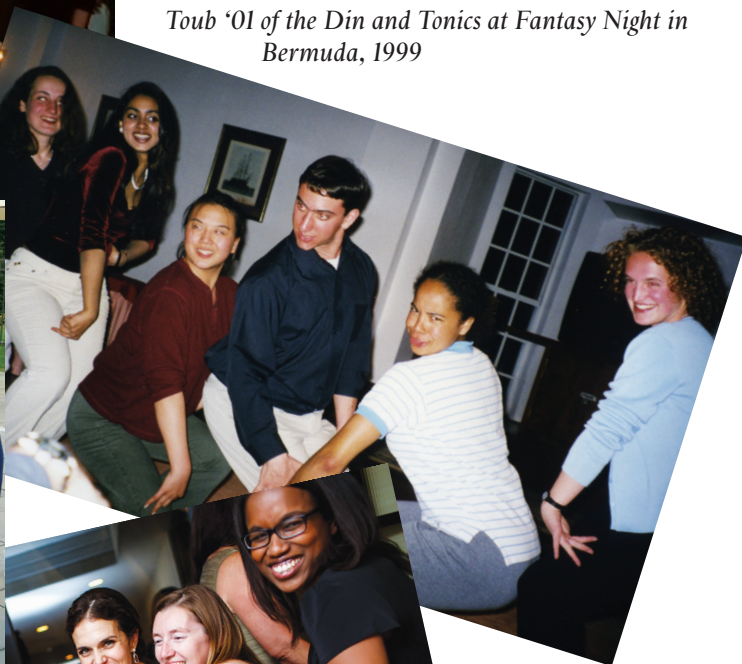
Left: Jesse Rokicki-Parashar '03, Sarah Park '02, Angie Boyce '03, Maya Anand '03, and Anne Hamel Steinhaus '02 with Joseph Keefe '04 of the Din and Tonics at Fantasy Night in Bermuda, 2001

Below: Alexandra Seru '01, Treeny Ahmed '01, Sue Chung '02, Ayana Johnson '02, and Cornelia Rinderknecht Eller '00 with Steve Toub '01 of the Din and Tonics at Fantasy Night in Bermuda, 1999



Above: Katie Monticchio Hallock '06, Emily Kahn Denoncour '05, Melissa Borja '04, Lindsey Knowles '07, Camille Powe '06, and Abby Cullinan '06 at the wedding of Alexis Z. Tumolo '06

Right: Vivian Lien '03, Aidan Madigan-Curtis '07, Alexis Z. Tumolo '06, T. Annie Knickman '09, and Camille Powe '06 at the wedding of Lindsey Knowles '07





Top: Pitches of 2007-2008 performing at Sanders in the spring of 2008 with soloist **Miriam Goldberg '08**

Center: Pitches of 2001-2002 performing at Sanders in the spring of 2002 with soloist **Maame Adwoa Banful '05**

Bottom: Pitches of 2000-2001 performing at Sanders in the fall of 2000 with soloist **Sara Wajnberg '04**

*I'm driving in my car
I turn on the radio
I'm pulling you close
But you just say no
You say you don't like it
But I know you're a liar
'Cause when we kiss
Ooooh, Fire*

*Late at night
I'm takin' you home
I say I wanna stay
You say you wanna be alone
You say you don't love me
But I know you're a liar
'Cause when we kiss
Ooooh, Fire... Fire*

*You had a hold on me
Right from the start
A grip so tight
I couldn't tear it apart
My nerves all jumpin'
Actin' like a fool
Your kisses they burn
But your heart stays cool*

*Romeo and Juliet
Samson and Delilah
Baby you can bet
Their love they didn't deny
Your words say split
But your words they lie
'Cause when we kiss
Ooooh, Fire... Fire*