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# On The Rocks goes on the record

■ The nine-member a capella group releases its first album today and enters an international competition this weekend

By Lisa Toth  
 Oregon Daily Emerald

The acoustics of an empty racquetball court became the prime location for warmups — a chamber of echoes. As nine guys slowly paced the hardwood floors, stomping their feet, the sound of their voices ricocheted off the walls, filling the room with a sound like a Gregorian chant mixed with tribal sounds, unsupported by instruments.

This original vocal talent has made "On the Rocks" and its members known on campus as the University's premier male a cappella group. The group's unique performances draw crowds — rain or shine — and draw from a hearty repertoire of pop, classical and oldies covers, which they reinvent in their personal a capella way.

The guys spent their winter break recording their first album, "OTR," which will be released today. Senior Peter Hollens, who sings tenor, said the Valentine's Day release fits the date not only because it includes "songs to smooch by" but also because its release is right before their appearance in the International Competition of Collegiate A cappella this weekend, Feb. 15 to 17, in Berkeley, Calif.

Hollens said the group, founded in winter 2000, hopes to sell about 3,000 of the 14-track CDs to fund the album's production costs, travel expenses for gigs and recording rights to use other people's songs.

Hollens said putting together the CD has only brought the group "closer as bros."

"It was stressful, but we loved it," he said.

Eugene recording engineer Don Ross worked with the group to record the album and said it took a team effort.

Fine tuning the vocal tracks, laying down overdubs and making sure the members voices had just the right blend were all a part of the mixing process. Ross said Tyler Boeh, who sings baritone and provides vocal percussion — an acquired skill that requires a lot of air and practice — enhanced the quality of the final production.

"He is amazing — how much rhythmic happenings come out of



Adam Amato Emerald

On The Rocks sang the national anthem at the women's basketball game on February 7.

his mouth," Ross said. "When he is close-miked ... it sounds like a full drum set."

The group couldn't come to a consensus at practice as to their favorite song, but "Romeo and Juliet" by Dire Straits, Guster's "Demons" and Linkin Park's "In the End" are just a few of audience's top picks.

"They are all my favorites," said sophomore Chris Dobson, who sings tenor.

The CD can be purchased at the group's weekly 4 p.m. Friday concerts in the EMU Amphitheater beginning Feb. 22.

Hollens said attending performances — full of laughs and fun — displays the group's "improvisation and spontaneity." But the CD is a chance for listeners to take the music home, he added, and pick out the individual voices of the members.

But until the weekly concerts begin, the group is practicing nonstop, preparing every minute detail of their performance before they travel to California.

While rehearsing modern rock band Guster's "Center of Attention" Tuesday night, the group formed a circle and played a game of vocal tag. Snapping their fingers while they sang, one member would make eye contact with another in the circle and take his place, forcing him to move and do the same. As the song's tempo accelerated, the singers switched places quicker, focusing on vocal clarity, but perfection didn't come easily.

So they each struck a pose and gave the song another shot.

Jim Harrington, an East Coast judge for the competition and the

Boston Ambassador for the Contemporary A cappella Society of America, assisted the group in arranging some of their songs. Harrington visited Eugene Jan. 26 to help the group improve their "performance techniques, group dynamics and focus."

"They certainly have what it takes to win the national championships," he said.

Last year, the group placed fourth in the region, but this year they hope to sweep the competition.

Harrington said the group's "East Coast sound" may work to their advantage. They will be up against tough competitors on the West Coast such as the Golden Overtones from Berkeley and UC-Berkeley's Men's Octet.

"What they have to do is basically just work toward the goal of being one sound instead of nine sounds," Harrington said.

Harrington added that the amount of work they put into their shows has paid off, and their group dynamics just click when they are on stage.

"They are definitely in tune with each other," he said. "And when they are in sync with each other, they are dead on."

Before he ever heard the group live, Harrington said he had seen videos of the guys performing and was already impressed with their ability, energy and camaraderie. "They have the ability to work with a crowd and have fun," Harrington said. "They love what they do, and that is the formula for success with any musical group."

E-mail Features/Pulse editor Lisa Toth at [lisatoth@dailyemerald.com](mailto:lisatoth@dailyemerald.com).

## A&E briefs

### Double feature has artistic flair

Take one part groundbreaking Manhattan graffiti artist Jean Michel Basquiat, mix in rocker David Bowie playing artist Andy Warhol, sprinkle with A-listers like Courtney Love, Gary Oldman and Benicio Del Toro, add a documentary flavor — and Friday's shaping

up to be one juicy double feature.

As part of its winter film series, the UO Cultural Forum will show "Downtown '81" and "Basquiat," a documentary and a cult indie film, respectively, that explore the 1980s New York City art scene.

Julien Schnabel directs 1996's "Basquiat," which explores the artist's personal and public life. Jeffrey Wright as Basquiat and Dennis Hopper co-star with Love, Del Toro

and Bowie. Schnabel received recent acclaim for "Before Night Falls," another film about an artist: Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas.

"Downtown '81," a more obscure film, takes a broader look at the art scene at the time.

The showing starts at 8 p.m. in 180 PLC. Tickets are \$2 for students and \$3 for the general public. For more information, call 346-0633.

—Jeremy Lang

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