

Naturally 7 hosts Salute to Bend A Cappella Festival

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
The Bulletin

The Tower Theatre hosted the fifth annual Bend A Cappella Festival last February. Roughly three weeks later, venues around the state shuttered due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“We were very lucky; we got in right under the wire,” festival director Nancy Phillips said.

Since then, the festival has weighed different ideas for its sixth year in the midst of COVID-19. At one point, vocal group Six Appeal was going to headline a smaller, socially distanced event limited to 100 people.

“At one point, we did say that we wanted to do that,” Phillips said, “and then we thought, this is just not going to work because we don’t want to ask people to travel and put themselves at risk.”

Eventually, the festival decided on a virtual event. The Salute to Bend A Cappella Festival will be available to stream starting at 7 p.m. Saturday, with additional screenings every night through Feb. 27.

If You Go

What: Salute to Bend A Cappella Festival hosted by Naturally 7

When: 7 p.m. Saturday, with screenings at the same time every day through Feb. 27

Where: Virtual show

Cost: \$20

Contact: towertheatre.org or 541-317-0700

Hosted by vocal septet Naturally 7, which headlined the festival in 2017 and 2019, the one-hour salute will feature memorable moments from previous years’ festivals as well as updates from previous champions such as Verdant and Sound Check.

“(We) always look forward to seeing what other up-and-coming groups are up to,” Naturally 7 musical director, baritone and rapper Roger Thomas wrote via email. “You never stop learning!”

Past headliners who will be featured in-

clude Peter Hollens, Deke Sharon and Six Appeal. Zimbabwean group Focus Acapella, which has not performed at the festival yet, also recorded a performance for the salute.

“One of them is pretty cool too because it was filmed inside the Tower Theatre, and that’s the Peter Hollens (version of) ‘You Raise Me Up’ by Josh Groban,” Phillips said.

Naturally 7, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2019 with the release of its 11th studio album, “20/20,” made for a natural choice to host the event (no pun intended). Since COVID-19 hit, the band has hosted a number of virtual concerts, including most recently a Christmas special and a 2020 year-in-review show in December.

Fans can look forward to a new virtual show, “Naturally 7 Goes to the Movies,” as well as a second volume of the mashup mix-tape the group released last year.



Naturally 7 headlines the 2017 Bend A Cappella Festival.

Lisa L. Bell/Submitted photo

“Many of us have friends and/or family members who have been impacted in the hardest way (by COVID),” Thomas said. “This is by far the longest we have ever been off the road in our career. On the flip side, it has forced us to be quite innovative with our virtual concerts.”

While used to performing without instruments, Naturally 7 and the other a cappella performers involved with the festival have had to adjust to performing without audiences.

“The biggest challenge is no automatic feedback while performing, which often uplifts the energy level and takes us as artists down a different road,” Thomas said. “On the other hand, it’s been a lot of fun getting creative in the virtual world.”

■ Reporter: 541-617-7814, bmcclhiney@bendbulletin.com



Naturally 7 “Salute to Bend A Cappella Festival”

The two-time headliners relive musical moments from past Festivals with stories, interviews, and videos. PLUS, we’ll meet Zimbabwe’s Focus Acapella!

February 20 • 7 PM

Streaming tickets and info at
TowerTheatre.org • 541-317-0700

SHOWCASE
PARTNER:

CORA
CENTRAL OREGON
RADIOLOGY ASSOCIATES

Cascade

Sotheby’s
INTERNATIONAL REALTY

APPLAUSE PARTNERS:

**STEVE & CYNDE
MAGIDSON**
TERRY REYNOLDS

BRAVO PARTNERS:

**SALLY
RUSSELL**

**First
Interstate Bank**

**Riverside
animal hospital**

**SALVESEN
HOMES**