



## **The Voice on A Cappella** **Pre-Performance Discussion/Activities**

### **A) What is A Cappella?**

A cappella music is produced using only the voice, without any instrumental accompaniment. It can come in any number of styles.

### **B) The History**

A cappella music has been around since the beginning of humankind. Indeed, the earliest forms of music were a cappella because instruments hadn't been invented yet! The earliest form of notated (written on paper) music was called Gregorian Chant and it was sung by monks and priests during religious ceremonies in the Middle Ages. These chants sounded very strange - they were usually several men singing the same thing over and over again. Just within the last few years Gregorian Chants have become somewhat of a novelty, and various recordings can be heard of them being sung by present-day monks and priests.

The music of that time started to split into two very different kinds: sacred (religious music) and secular (non-religious music). While secular musicians (for the most part) played musical instruments, sacred musicians rarely did. In fact, that is exactly how a cappella got its name. Since most of sacred singing was done in small churches, or "chapels", someone decided to call it A cappella- latin for "in chapel". Although today we understand a cappella music to be music without instruments, it used to mean music sung in the church.

### **C) Styles**

What do you think of when you hear the word "a cappella"? A lot of people think of professional groups who sing a cappella like Boyz II Men, The Nylons, or Rockapella from the television show Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego. Other people think about singing in choirs or churches, while still others think about barbershop quartets. They are all right! A cappella music comes in many different styles, each as different as the next. There is no limit to the number of styles a cappella can have, just as regular music has no limits. However there are some general categories of a cappella music. Here are some:

#### **Barbershop**

This style was made popular right around the turn of the 20th century. Barbershop groups consisted usually (but not always) of

four men who entertained people while they were getting a shave and a haircut (hence the name). The music is characterized by strong powerful chords and close harmony.

### **Doo-wop**

Often called “street-corner doo wop”, this style of a cappella music has been around since the fifties but has changed with the times.

### **Modern**

Rather than adopting a traditional vocal style of singing, modern a cappella groups often try to imitate the sounds produced by musical instruments. The objective of modern a cappella is to make listener think that the sounds that he or she is hearing are musical instruments.

## **D) The Music**

HOJA performs mostly in the modern style of a cappella, although occasionally they sing some doo-wop.

## **E) The Arrangements and Voice Parts**

Most a cappella groups have between four and six parts. HOJA sings with four parts, which is the most common arrangement. Most groups have singers with different types of voices so that the music will have low parts, medium parts, and high parts.

### **Bass**

The bass, or lowest part, is usually a singer who can sing almost two octaves(12 tones) below middle "C". In a cappella, he usually sings the parts that a bass guitar would play in a band.

### **Baritone**

The baritone is the second lowest singer. He usually sings the lowest harmonies after the bass, but can sometimes sing the bass parts or the lead melody to add variety to the sound of the group.

### **Tenor**

The tenor is the part that usually sings most of the leads. Almost any male pop singer is a tenor (with exceptions like the lead singer of the Crash Test Dummies, and Hootie and the Blowfish). When the tenor isn't singing lead he can sing either the low harmonies or the high harmonies.

### **Counter-Tenor Or Soprano**

This is just another tenor singer who sings most of his parts in “falsetto”. Falsetto is a lighter sounding voice on the high end of the singers range. The counter-tenor usually covers the high harmonies, but can also sing any tenor parts, including lead.

### **Alto**

The alto is the lowest female voice, who usually sings close to the same range as a male tenor part. HOJA is an all male group, but there are many groups which include both males

and females, and also some groups made up entirely of females.

### Soprano

The soprano is the highest female voice, who sings the same parts as a counter-tenor, and she can usually sing a bit higher. When a male uses his “falsetto” voice, it is usually similar to the sound and the range of a soprano female singer.

Although every singer may fall into one of these categories, a good a cappella group makes use of the fact that everybody can use their voice in many different ways. This is what helps an a cappella group sound as good as a regular band that uses different kinds of instruments.

### **The following is a description of some of the different ways you can use your voice in a cappella:**

#### Lead Singer

This is the person who sings the words of the song (also called “lyrics”). Most groups trade off so that each person gets a chance to be the lead singer for different songs, and sometimes two or more singers can take turns singing the lead in a single song.

#### Harmonies

This is when one or more singers sing the words along with the lead singer, but they sing different notes so that the sound is more full. This often happens during the chorus of a song.

#### Background

These are long held sounds like “ooh” and “aah” which help to make the music sound full, but do not interfere with any of the other singers’ parts. They blend into the background where someone else like the lead singer is doing something more noticeable.

#### Drums

Someone who can make good drum sounds with their voice is a very good person to have in an a cappella group, because this is what helps it to sound more like a regular band. It is often easier to make drum sounds when you use a microphone, but it is not necessary all the time.

#### Instruments

Of course we don’t mean real instruments, but your voice can be used to imitate almost any instrument there is. Guitars and trumpets are the two that HOJA imitates the most, but it’s fun to try them all.

#### Sound Effects

This one is a lot of fun because it lets you use your voice and your imagination to make all sorts of sounds, even if it is not actual singing. You could imitate a big crashing noise like thunder, a high pitched whistle, animal noises, or even use shouting or laughing. All of these sounds can add to the music and the more creative you can be the better.

## **F) The Choreography**

HOJA is different from most other groups because of their extensive use of choreography. Choreography is pre-planned stage movement. It can be anything from walking across the stage to complex dance movements.

## **Post-Performance Project**

### **A) Question/Answer Session**

What did you like about the show? Dislike? Why?

What was your favorite song? Why?

Who was your favorite singer? Why?

Who had the lowest voice?

Who was the “drummer” most of the time?

What makes HOJA different from other a cappella groups?

What kinds of choreography (dancing and movement) did HOJA do?

What other groups do you know that sing a cappella?

### **B) Write letters to the Group**

A great class assignment would be to have each student write a letter to the group. They can tell them what they liked about the show and should feel free to ask lots of questions.

Letters can be sent to:

**HOJA  
Box 1334  
Saskatoon,SK  
S7K 3N9**