



# The MVEer Monthly

February, 2016

## February/March Highlights



**Dress Rehearsal** – Thursday, February 18 at 6pm at St. Ann's Center for Intergenerational Care at the Stein Campus, is located at **2801 East Morgan Ave.** on Milwaukee's south side.



**St. Ann Center Talent Show at Turner Hall Ballroom** –Tuesday, March 1, at **Turner Hall Ballroom, 1040 N. 4th Street.** Doors open at 5:30 p.m. with the show starting at 6:30 p.m.

Ten finalists are set to compete in front of a three-judge panel including Emmy Award-winning actor, comedian and television host John McGivern. The acts were selected from dozens of auditions to vie for the \$1,000 first prize and the \$500 Fan Favorite Award determined by the audience. The power-packed lineup includes:

- **The Midwest Vocal Express**, a male a cappella chorus headquartered in Greendale and made up of singers from across Southeast Wisconsin. They ranked 15th in the world of barbershop choruses in a 2015 international contest.
- **Ella Curran**, 17, a Shorewood High School senior with a love for opera and musical theater. She played Sally in Shorewood High's production of Cabaret and plans to study vocal performance in college.
- **Warped Dance Company**, a semi-professional company dedicated to bringing the relevance and vitality of concert dance to Milwaukee. The company includes a youth company and mentors young dancers interested in a professional dance career.
- **The Clarinet and Accordion Guys**, Rich Regent on clarinet and accordionist John Dudzik tackle everything from Dixieland to jazz to toe-tapping polkas.
- **The Meladies**, Marquette University's premier all-female a cappella group. A sisterhood of song, they are among the elite groups chosen to participate in the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella.
- **Pianist Benjamin Nelson**, 14, a freshman at The Prairie School. He names Chopin as his favorite composer and enjoys playing his intricate piano solos.
- **Alicia Obiakor**, 12, a seventh-grader at Shorewood Intermediate School. Alicia has a powerful, soulful voice she's been honing since she was 18 months old.
- **LocoMotion Dance Company**, a nonprofit arts organization that inspires youth to pursue their dreams through dance. This energetic troupe performs jazz and ballet to traditional African dance and hip-hop.

# CENTER STAGE

# TALENT SHOW

## AT TURNER HALL BALLROOM

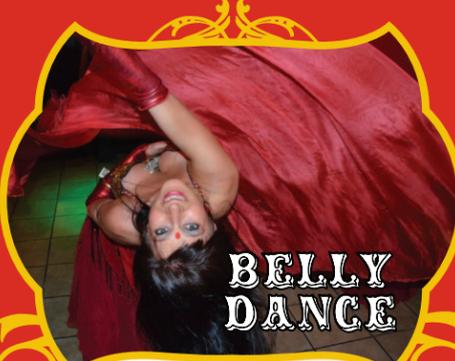
### ADMISSION

Online: \$20/Adults  
\$10/children | \$50/Family  
Door Price: \$25 & \$15

**PURCHASE TICKETS NOW:**  
[stanncenter.org/centerstage](http://stanncenter.org/centerstage)

**TUESDAY,  
MARCH 1**

Doors open 5:30pm  
Talents begin 6:30pm



BELLY DANCE



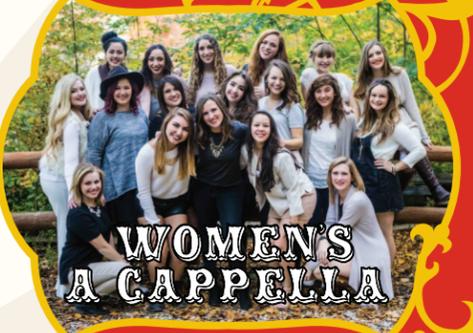
PIANO



CLARINET & ACCORDIAN



ROCK BAND



WOMEN'S A CAPPELLA

### FEATURING

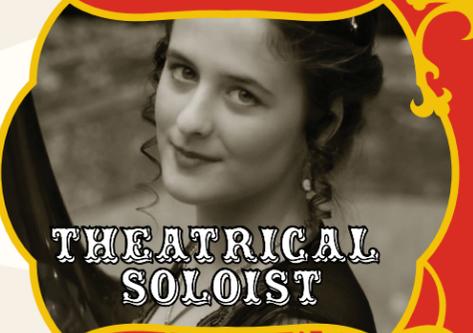
10 talents performing for the chance to win a \$1000 grand prize  
Plus, you pick the Fan Favorite \$500 winner

**SNACKS, POPCORN & FUN FOR ALL AGES**

included

### SPECIAL GUESTS

John McGivern, Joanne Weintraub, Erica Lofton & Portia Young



THEATRICAL SOLOIST



HIP-HOP DANCE



VOCAL SOLOIST



CONCERT DANCE



BARBERSHOP CHORUS

### FUNDRAISER

for St. Ann Center's Care Champions Program

### SUPPORT

health and wellness care for all ages and abilities

- **Dimitra Anderson**, a 56-year-old belly dancer known for her elegantly athletic performances. After taking lessons from the Milwaukee Recreation Department, she has gone on to perform nationally, doing her own choreography and costuming.
- **The BAND Hennes**—a close-knit combo of sisters —Meguire, 13, on keyboards, KyLee, 11, on acoustic/electric guitar, Olivia, 9, on drums and Taressa, 6, on bass. They love playing classic rock songs (AC/DC, Journey, Bon Jovi) as well as current covers of all genres.

**Portia Young**, former news personality at WISN-TV and currently public relations manager for Sargento Foods, will emcee the event. Joining McGivern as judges will be Joanne Weintraub, a writer and longtime TV critic for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and 14-year-old singer and youth activist Erica Lofton, last year's Center Stage winner.

Advance admission for the talent show is \$20 for adults and \$10 for children, or \$50 for a family pass (two adults and two children). Purchase online at [stanncenter.org/centerstage](http://stanncenter.org/centerstage). Prices increase to \$25 and \$15 at the door. All proceeds support St. Ann Center's Care Champions program which provides wellness services, therapy, meals and entertainment to clients without the ability to pay.

## **Interview in CASA of Mickey Rapkin & Ben Haist**

<https://www.casa.org/content/interviewmickeyrapkin>



**Mickey Rapkin**, previously a senior editor at **GQ** for seven years, is a monthly columnist at **Elle** magazine and a contributing editor to **Bon Appetit**. His first book, "**Pitch Perfect**," about the competitive world of collegiate a cappella groups, was published in 2008 and immediately optioned by Universal. The film adaptation, starring Oscar-nominee **Anna Kendrick** ("Up in the Air") and **Rebel Wilson** ("Bridesmaids"), was produced by **Elizabeth Banks** ("The Hunger Games") and came out in October 2012. Rapkin's second book, "**Theater Geek**," was published in 2010 and was featured on CBS Sunday Morning and in Vanity Fair.

A cappella was never "cool." Professionals never used to openly admit singing in poorly named collegiate *a cappella* groups. If you asked a high schooler what a cappella was five years ago, he might say it was a bunch of balding old men singing without instruments in awful matching blazers.

Today, only half of that sentence is true. Yes, awful matching blazers are still a thing, but all sorts of people are wearing them, from foxy female collegiate groups, to co-ed high school groups, to sophisticated post-collegiate groups. And no, we're not performing "Buffalo Gals" or Beach Boys hits (not that Beach Boys are lame...because they're not); we're hitting up Nicki Minaj, Justin Bieber, Skrillex, Bon Iver, Grizzly Bear, and St. Vincent. We're in a new, glorious aca-era where groups like Pentatonix and Forte exist, pushing the envelope with reinventions of current songs and continuous creation of originals.

We've come a long way, baby. Readers of Mickey Rapkin's book [Pitch Perfect: The Quest for Collegiate A Cappella Glory](#) can learn the roots of contemporary a cappella in the U.S. while following three notable collegiate groups: the Beelzebubs from Tufts, Divisi from the University of Oregon, and the Hullabahoos from University of Virginia.

But why write about a cappella? Why choose a weird subculture within university life full of overdramatic divas, self-entitled tools, and awkward bopping masses? Mickey Rapkin answers this question and more.



**Heather or H: When did the idea of *Pitch Perfect* come to you? What were you hoping to portray/explain?**

**RAPKIN:** "Writing a book is a long process and I needed to find something that would sustain my interest. I thought about what I loved most. And one of those things was collegiate a cappella. I knew there was this whole world out there that most people knew nothing about. And yet it was kind of all around us. As I remember it, I'd started to see all of these *a cappella* jokes on "The Office" and "30 Rock." I'd heard that Diane Sawyer and **Anne Hathaway** and **John Legend** had all been a part of *a cappella*. Also, I loved the idea that in college, a cappella was celebrated. These groups were taking world tours and recording albums. My own group (The Cayuga Waiters of Cornell University) would sell out Cornell's Bailey Hall—a 2,000 person arena—every spring. There were 1,200 *a cappella* groups across the country. Yet once a lot of these kids graduated, they were suddenly embarrassed to admit they'd ever been part of this world. I wanted the book to celebrate this wild subculture."

**H: When did you start singing, and what led you to a cappella?**

**RAPKIN:** I became obsessed with a cappella on the first day of college, basically. I went to Cornell where there are something like 20 a cappella groups. And these groups were treated like rock stars on campus. I'm not kidding. It was an unbelievable scene and I was desperate to be a part of it. I'm not ashamed to admit I auditioned several times for different groups. Finally, the second semester of my sophomore year, **Cayuga's Waiters** took pity on me and let me into the

group. It was probably the definitive experience of my college career. I could win a Pulitzer Prize and it probably wouldn't mean as much to me as getting to sing "Southern Cross" at the Waiters' annual spring concert, Spring Fever.

*When it came to the actual research for the book, Rapkin sought to include a representative sample of collegiate a cappella: a group with a rich history (the Bubs), a group competing in the ICCAs (Divisi), and a group known for their good-time attitude (the Hullabahoos). He followed each group over the course of the 2006 - 2007 school year, attending various events like competitions, trips to the studio, or even on spring break.*

*So the big question is...*

**H: How did *Pitch Perfect* actually become a movie? Were you approached by someone, or had you been advocating for a film adaptation?**

**RAPKIN:** Elizabeth Banks and Max Handelman—the producers—got ahold of the book proposal for "Pitch Perfect", and stayed in touch as I was reporting and writing. When the book was published, they took the project to Universal and the executives there optioned the book. Max and Elizabeth had gone to UPENN and were familiar with the world of a cappella, where men singing cover tunes without instruments are considered cool. They saw the potential for humor in this.

**H: How much input did you have in the entire process?**

**RAPKIN:** I was a consultant, ultimately. The screenwriter, Kay Cannon—an amazingly funny writer from "30 Rock" who is now a producer on "The New Girl"—would e-mail me questions. Could X happen in a cappella? Or what about this scenario? I went to visit the set for a week, as well. The producers were fantastic about keeping me a part of the process, which they didn't have to do. From other authors, I understand this is not always the case. It sounds self-serving, but the truth is, I can't say enough good things about the producers, the team at Gold Circle, the director Jason Moore, the screenwriter Kay Cannon, *etc.*

**H: How does the movie hold up to the book? What are the major differences?**

**RAPKIN:** The movie is inspired by the book. Meaning, they've got the same premise: An all-female a cappella group makes it to the finals of the ICCAs—only to lose spectacularly. The girls are determined to make it back to the finals to right this wrong, except their ranks have been heavily depleted and the girls need to restock first. The movie takes that premise and runs with it.

**H: When it comes to the film adaptation, do you think it's an accurate take on collegiate a cappella?**

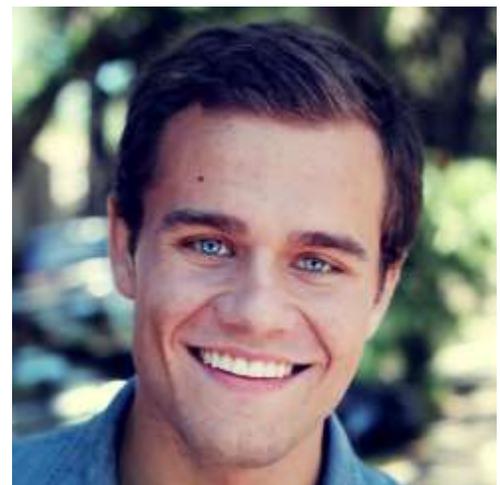
**RAPKIN:** Having been a big a cappella dork myself, I can honestly say—outside of my own involvement here—that I love this film. It celebrates everything awesome about a cappella. The friendships. The arrangements. That indescribable feeling of standing on stage with your best friends singing Justin Timberlake tunes on dims and bops.

**H: What are the most obvious a cappella stereotypes that the characters embody? Which character is your favorite, or which character reminds you the most of yourself in college?**

**RAPKIN:** I'm most like Benji, who is played in the film by the very talented Ben Platt. He's a guy who is obsessed with a cappella singers on campus and desperately wants to be a part of the scene, but struggles to break in. I can't tell you how heartbreaking it was for me to go see a cappella shows during my freshman year at Cornell, knowing how much I wanted to be on that stage yet being totally shut out. I always wanted to be like Skylar Astin's character, Jesse—the cool guy with the ridiculous voice. But I was definitely a Benji. Even after I was accepted into the Waiters—eventually becoming the group's leader my senior year—I would still sometimes look around the stage during a show and think, I can't believe I get to do this.

Sometimes we as a cappella performers have to step back and really appreciate where we are and how privileged we are to do what we do.

*But my interview couldn't end there. I had to know more about this project, about working with **Anna Kendrick** and , both huge stars on the Big White Way in their own respects. Astin is well known for his fabulous boy belting in "Spring Awakening", and Kendrick was nominated for a Tony Award when she was 12 years old. TWELVE. You might say they're talented. Through the magic of Facebook chat, I got to interview **Ben Haist** (pictured on the right), a recent graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, and an extra in the movie. Since a lot of taping for the film was done in Louisiana, many students from Tulane star in the film as members of different a cappella groups. I asked Ben what his side of the story was, witnessing the movie firsthand.*



**H: What is your official role in the movie?**

**HAIST:** I'm "BU Harmonic #1" – at Barden University (the school in the film), there are four groups: the Bellas and the Treblemakers (the two main rival groups), and the Harmonics and the High Notes (secondary groups featured throughout the film and as part of the Riff-Off). We're described in the screenplay as "homely girls and guys who don't know they're gay yet."

**H: What is your experience in collegiate a cappella?**

**HAIST:** In the spring of 2009, I joined THEM at Tulane University in New Orleans – sang tenor, did VP, designed all of our posters/promo materials, arranged for the group, and served as President during my senior year. I grew up with music all around me – band, choir, piano lessons, musical theater, show choir – that when I got to college, it was kind of a no-brainer to keep up with it in some fashion; little did I know that it would pretty much define my college experience.

Also, my other "claim to fame" was being second runner up in the A Cappella Blog's 2010 ICCA Bracket and I will carry that title to the grave.

**H: Did you read *Pitch Perfect* prior to auditioning? If not, did you read it afterwards? What were your thoughts/expectations?**

**HAIST:** I'd heard about it, but hadn't read it until after my second callback for the film. I read it cover-to-cover in about two days in between class and avoiding homework. Given that Tulane has a small a cappella scene, and we're kind of geographically isolated from other schools with bigger scenes, my frame of reference for the aca-world came from obsessive YouTube-creeping, "Mouth Off" (podcast), and the occasional visiting group that came down to New Orleans. Reading *Pitch Perfect* just confirmed to me that I loved what I was doing and that even the "big boys" of a cappella had to go through all the same group politics and drama and rivalry I did.

**H: Was rehearsal for the movie anything like a normal collegiate rehearsal?**

**HAIST:** Yes, but with more famous people. My roommate was also cast as a Harmonic, and one of our freshmen was a High Note, so that worked out pretty well for scheduling. We had three days of rehearsal in October, and it was all for the riff-off. If you haven't seen the clip in the trailer, it's a big on-campus competition between all four groups at Barden – one group starts out singing a song from a category, and the other groups can steal by taking a lyric from the current song and branching off on a new song. We spent the first two days learning and rehearsing the songs with Deke Sharon, as well as staging the riff-off with our choreographers. They actually cast a few other people from college

groups (Green Envy at Tulane, All-Night Yahtzee, SoCal Vocals), so that gave the rest of the cast a point of reference for what it's like to actually be in an a cappella group.

I have to admit I was a bit starstruck walking into our first rehearsal, but once we started singing, it felt completely natural. Anna Kendrick really blew me away in the music rehearsals – girl can SANG. Our last day of rehearsals was a location rehearsal – it was in this awesome abandoned pool on LSU's campus, but it was really overrun with dirt/plants (there was even a tree growing through one of the drains) – and recording with Deke and Ed. It was like an a cappella vacation.

**H: What's the biggest difference between the way a cappella is portrayed in the movie versus real life?**

**HAIST:** I think the biggest difference is the scale of it all. In the movie, the ICCAs have CRAZY light shows, the dancing was SUPER aerobic and intense, and the performance venues were the best they had in Baton Rouge – even for the audition scenes. Also, the whole “let's come up with an arrangement right on the spot and it sounds amazing” deal they have in the riff-off and with some other scenes with the Bellas is fun, but definitely far-fetched for most college groups (my group has given me death threats when I've tried to get them to improvise).

**H: In your opinion, what makes a group successful? How does a group reach "A Cappella Glory?"**

**HAIST:** Know your group. Push yourselves, but know your limitations. Do what you do best. Sing well.

I feel like that's all to say the cliché “be yourself,” but you HAVE to know what your group does well and doesn't do well. When my group did ICCAs in 2011, we tried so hard to mold our set into what had been done well, and I think we lost a bit of who we were at heart.

**H: What are the most obvious a cappella stereotypes that the characters embody? Which character reminds you the most of yourself?**

**HAIST:** Aubrey (Anna Camp) and Bumper (Adam Devine) are TOTALLY every power-hungry college group president or MD you love to hate. Aubrey's hell-bent on keeping up the tradition of the Bellas of old (even at the expense of the newer members of the group), and Bumper's a wannabe frat star with an ego to match. They're SO perfect. Probably the character I identified with the most was Benji (Ben Platt). He's a bit of a dork, but really endearing and puts his heart into everything he does/likes. He's got a great character arc, too.

## **H: What stereotypes does the movie seek to break?**

**HAIST:** I think it does a great job of continuing the legacy of “The Sing-Off” – that a cappella isn’t just a bunch of harmonizing dorks wearing sweater vests anymore. We might still be a bunch of weirdos (myself included), but darn it, we can rock, we can groove, and we can put on a good show!

Also, much like we’ve seen with the rise of girl groups like Delilah, Musae, and the Boxettes, Pitch Perfect centers around an all-female group trying to shed their roots (super girly Ace of Base covers) for a more edgy, rough, intense sound (case in point: “No Diggity”). They might not be all that great at first, but, by the end of the film, they’re slaying it.

*Like many college campuses, mine was graced with an advanced screening of the film. Having read Rapkin’s original work, I was very pleased with the way the writers incorporated the book with fresh ideas for the screen. Too many moments were spent with me whispering to my group: “WE’VE DONE THAT” or “THAT IS TOTALLY SO-AND-SO” or completely shrinking in my seat when they sang a song I once had feebly arranged or soloed on. However by the end of the film I found myself clapping and cheering and filled with those familiar warm fuzzies.*

*Collegiate a cappella is such a huge stepping stone to creating post-collegiate groups and teaching high school a cappella groups. Even if you’re only a supportive fan of a cappella, you still are contributing to a fast-growing culture that supports friendship and music, that celebrates competition and embraces creativity. Don’t just take it from me:*

## **H: What do you think is most rewarding about participating in collegiate a cappella?**

**HAIST:** Once again, lots of clichés here, but I feel like I found my second family in my a cappella group. When I joined my second semester freshman year, I hadn’t really figured out who I was in the college sphere, and a cappella really helped me find myself and a group of friends who I could geek out with. Also, joining THEM threw me into the deep end of the music skills pool, and I’m a much better musician for it.

**RAPKIN:** The camaraderie that comes with making music. This will sound hopelessly lame, but I have to say: There’s nothing better than the sound of 12 drunk dudes harmonizing. There’s a little appendix to the paperback version of *Pitch Perfect*, where I talk about my own experiences in a cappella and how I love going back to Cornell to see my old group perform. I graduated from college in 2000. The kids there now? They’re class of 2016. When I tell them what year I graduated, they look at me like I am the oldest person who has ever walked the

earth. But I don't care. That little insult is worth it to get up on that stage one more time.

*I think it's high time we stop referring to ourselves as "aca-nerds", as "lame", as "embarrassing." If you take away anything from the book or the movie, let it be the sheer fact that human beings can come together, make incredible music, and create lifelong memories.*

*NONE of that is lame. In fact, it's kind of perfect.*

Author: **Heather Newkirk** is currently a member of Main Squeeze, an all-female group at Syracuse University, and she received an award for Best Arrangement in the 2012 ICCAs. Permission to reprint article submitted to CASA, but no reply to request.