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HIGH NOTES

A CAPPELLA IS PIPING UP EVERYWHERE

A cappella singing flowered during the Renaissance (in Italian, it means “in chapel style”), and it’s been beloved by barbershop quartets, doo-wop daddy-o’s, and collegiate songsters off on a spree since Cole Porter was one of the first Whiffenpoofs at Yale. Today, this silky subgenre of vocal music (performed without instrumental accompaniment) has an ever bigger foothold in the culture, from pop to rock, to classical, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C., is honoring that reality with a 10-day festival, “Sing Solo,” May 28 through June 6. The series includes free

concerts on the Center’s Millennium Stage by the likes of Sweet Honey in the Rock, the U.S. Army Chorus, and the U.S. Navy Sea Chanters. The highlight is a June 1 show led by Bobby McFerrin and featuring a range of topflight groups including Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the Grammy-, Emmy-, and Academy Award-winning South African ensemble that shot to fame on Paul Simon’s *Graceland* album. Meanwhile, Mickey Rapkin is coming out with a book, *Pitch Perfect: The Quest for Collegiate a Cappella Glory* (Gotham), which chronicles a year in the life of three ensembles around the country, interwoven with decades of lore (Jessica Biel was rejected by the Tufts Amalgamates, Brooke Shields by my alma mater’s group, the Princeton Katzenjammers). Even Hollywood is blowing its pitch pipe: J. J. Abrams, the hot-shot writer-producer-director behind *Alias* and *Lost*, has an untitled a cappella project in the works.

—TODD S. PURDUM



Clockwise from above: College pennants; the Whiffenpoofs' charter members, 1909; the 2008 Whiffenpoofs.

WHIFFENPOOFS' Charter Members
Hiltinger, Peimano, Fautz, Howard, Jochmann