

## The Backbeats

The Backbeats have barely taken off and already they've set the world on fire.

When they first stepped before the camera on Season 2 of "The Sing-Off," opened their mouths and unleashed their jubilant harmonies, that was not only their network debut – it was the first time these gifted young men and women had ever sung together in public, anywhere.

And by the time they'd seized third place at season's end, they had ignited a blaze whose light had drawn thousands of fans not only to their unique sound but also to the contemporary *a cappella* phenomenon as a whole.

No one in the Backbeats had any idea where their path would lead when they resolved to compete in the popular NBC series. But once it was over, they knew that they were riding a wave that would take them places none had imagined reaching before.

That wave crests with the release of their self-titled, first album on the aptly named Arrival Records/Madison Gate imprint. Drawn together by their televised adventure, knowing that something bigger than their considerable individual gifts was leading them now, they hit the studio with a unified vision and a determination to spread the joy they draw from music to listeners everywhere.

Listen to the shimmering textures, gentle at first and blossoming into the choruses of Katy Perry's "Firework." The gentle ecstasies of the lead and backing vocals on their version of Adele's "Turning Tables." The full-bodied treatment of "Need You Now" takes on new intensity through expansions on Lady Antebellum's original three-part arrangement.

Every track on *The Backbeats* crackles with the excitement of artistry energized by the sheer love of singing. That same quality brought them into the spotlight on "The Sing-Off," but here it rises to a higher level of achievement. Impeccably crafted, this album will be remembered as a milestone in the chronicle of *a cappella* recordings.

"It definitely encapsulates us as a band and as artists," says alto Rachel Saltzman, speaking for the group. "It demonstrates a lot of what we did on the show – we portrayed deeply expressive and emotional qualities in our performances. Using that as our backbone, the album gave us a chance to showcase our voices differently than we could on the show. The emotions hit even harder because of the bigger sound we can create in a studio setting."

That sound comes not only from their talent and camaraderie; it also results from the fact that they insist on singing only songs that speak to them personally. "Every single song tells a story about somebody and something in relation to the meaning of our group and

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what we try to express as individuals and as a whole,” Saltzman comments.

It is frankly difficult to accept that the Backbeats accomplished all this while most of them were still in college, singing with their school’s *a cappella* groups, with baritone Kenton Chen, soprano Kelley Jakle, tenor Eitan Nir and alto Saltzman at USC, from which bass Todd G. Levin had recently graduated, soprano Joanna Jones at UCLA, and alto/vocal percussionist Courtney Jensen at Brigham Young University, while Jordan Pharoah, an alumnus of the Los Angeles County High School of the Performing Arts, was performing around Southern California.

This diverse gathering found common ground in the skills demanded for unaccompanied vocals. Perhaps the most important of these is to be able to listen to every voice in the blend while singing, making sure that it all comes together seamlessly. But with the Backbeats in particular, there was an additional requirement that each note convey the greatest possible feeling.

The bonds of trust developed rapidly as they began rehearsing for “The Sing-Off.” “We didn’t know what our group’s sound would be like when we came into it,” Saltzman says. “Like I said, our first performance ever was on the show, so we went on this little retreat before the taping. For a week we lived in a house together and just sang and ate and got to know each other more. You could tell even then there was something special here. We had no idea how people would react to us; we didn’t even think it would last past this summer. But it has and we wanted to keep it going.”

That’s what brought them into the studio. Ben Bram and Kenton Chen, who arranged and produced the album together, kept the magic alive by combining careful execution with spontaneity. “In the recording studio, options are limitless,” Bram explains. “On ‘The Sing-Off,’ The Backbeats only had their ten voices. In the studio, we could track as many times as we wanted. So we arranged everything carefully while also using the strengths of the studio, to maintain the soul and passion of the individual voices and the group sound as a whole. This gave us a chance to explore new songs and dig deeper into a variety of styles.”

“We do more than just sing,” Saltzman concludes. “We tell stories. We evoke emotions in ourselves and, hopefully, in the people we’re singing to. At the end of the day, it’s about making great music. We are a singing group, we are singers and we’re happiest when that’s what we’re doing.”

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