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Indy artist **Manuja Waldia** is the talent behind sharp new Shakespeare covers coming soon to a bookstore near you, p. 20 →

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Note-Worthy

Straight No Chaser, the internationally famous a cappella group that originated at IU, marks its 20th anniversary this month with four days of concerts back home. →

← ***Straight No Chaser***

THE GROUP STARTED HARMONIZING WHILE

STUDENTS AT IU. David Roberts, Steve Morgan, and Randy Stine, all founding members of Straight No Chaser in 1996, still perform with the group today. Stine got “the call” from the CEO of Atlantic Records in 2008, and that’s when things really took off.

ITS NAME IS TAKEN FROM THE 1967 THELONIOUS

MONK ALBUM. “But it also represents what we do,” says Roberts. “We’re on stage, giving it to the audience straight. There are no fill tracks, no instruments—just our voices.”

HONESTLY? THERE ARE CERTAIN HOLIDAY SONGS

THEY NEVER WANT TO HEAR AGAIN. For Roberts, that would be Mariah Carey’s warbling of “All I Want for Christmas Is You.” Stine changes the radio station whenever he hears the strains of “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus.” And Morgan has had it with Eartha Kitt purring her way through “Santa Baby.” “The good news,” he says, “is I don’t see us ever trying to cover that one.”

BUT THERE’S ONE TUNE

THEY’LL NEVER ABANDON. A YouTube video of Straight No Chaser singing “The 12 Days of Christmas” has been viewed nearly 20 million times, and helped propel them to stardom. “The old country adage is, ‘You gotta dance with who brung ya,’” says Morgan, “and the crowd still loves it when we go into the song.”

SOME NEW CLASSICS HAVE ENTERED THE MIX.

A mash-up of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” with Bruno Mars’s “Uptown Funk” is a particular fave of several members.

THEIR PERSONAL HOLIDAY PLAYLISTS ARE A MIX

OF MODERN AND OLD-SCHOOL. “Mine is skewed probably toward Harry Connick Jr.,” says Roberts, opening his iTunes to check. “I have a lot of songs on his album

When My Heart Finds Christmas. I’ve got some John Denver—*Rocky Mountain Christmas.*” Morgan also likes throwback music: “My mom and dad are huge Andy Williams fans, so his Christmas album was always the soundtrack to our tree-decorating.”

YES, THE GUYS ARE FANS OF PITCH PERFECT.

And the sequel. And *The Sing-Off*, NBC’s a cappella competition. “When *Pitch Perfect* grossed over \$100 million internationally in 2012 and had its soundtrack go platinum, it showed a cappella was ready for the mainstream,” says Morgan. “Anything that makes people feel less threatened when they see the description ‘a cappella concert’ can only be a good thing.” Roberts, for one,

can definitely relate to the movie’s Barden Bellas and Treble-makers: “I like to joke that I have a hard time watching *Pitch Perfect* because it cuts pretty close. It’s *real* close.”

A CAPPELLA AT IU IS

THRIVING—COINCIDENCE?

When Straight No Chaser’s original members began recording under that name, the IU a cappella group became known as Another Round. They’ve since been joined by vocal acts such as Ladies First; Hooshir, a coed ensemble; and Crimson Cadence, an octet.

HOLIDAY CAROLERS, LISTEN UP. The guys have some thoughts for your own singing troupe this season. For Roberts, it’s all about the tunes—if “Frosty the Snowman” has grown stale for you, look elsewhere. “Pick songs that you have fun doing,” he says. But most of all, says Morgan, just do it. “Caroling is one of the greatest gifts you can give at Christmastime!” he says. “Go to people at a nursing home who can’t get out as easily, and watch their faces light up when friends and neighbors come to spread holiday mirth and cheer. It’s magical!” —KELLY KENDALL



The boys return to Bloomington for their current world tour, “I’ll Have Another,” on December 14. Then they swing by the Murat Theatre from December 21 to 23.

Unspoken Rules

Tree Farms

The clear-cut guide to finding your perfect specimen.



For a tree that stays fresh through Epiphany, skip the pre-cut options and channel your inner lumberjack. Axe, no. Bow saw, yes. Stop and smell the branches—really. Each variety of tree has a unique scent, such as the citrusy aroma of concolor firs. Consider your ornaments. Heavy decorations need the stiffer branches of varieties like blue spruce. On a budget? Look for fast-growing pines. Ready to splurge? Choose slower-growing firs. Measure twice, cut once. Trees look deceptively smaller in the great outdoors. Plan ahead for transport. Giant tree + Mini Cooper = impossible physics. Want a silent night? Skip the busy weekends and come on a weeknight. (All is calm, all is bright.) —ASHLEY PETRY