

Review: The Vineyard Sound in Concert

by Jeffrey Shannon Martha's Vineyard Times, August 7, 1997

Friday's a cappella performance at the Tabernacle by Vineyard Sound was superb and enthusiastically received. Before the show started there was a relaxed buzz around the courtyard: walkers strolled, bicyclers circled, two young boys played whiffleball, and a host of others relaxed and chatted on their blankets. By showtime the place was packed. The talented group of nine men opened with "Good Old A Cappella."

Then Jason Brown, the group's dramatic anchor, prodded the friendly island crowd: "Are you ready to rumble? I can't hear you. Do I have to take my clothes off for a better response?" He did not; the crowd roared.

Song number two was a wonderful tune called "Girlfriend", by Matthew Sweet, replete with superb lead vocals by Sam Bigelow and hilarious musical improvisations by fill-in David Cope. The next number showed the group's softer side: a Sam Cooke classic called "Bring it Home", which was well received. Susan Clarke, visiting from Boston, put her critical finger on it: "They're fun, talent with personality."

How does one begin in a cappella singing? "I went to see Skidmore College's a cappella group, the Bandersnatchers, and it looked like fun," Ian Varley said. Four of the group's members have sung with the Bandersnatchers: Ian Varley, Dylan Connor, Erik Grimaldi, and Jason Brown. "We have jazz purists, rock & roll junkies, Buffett and Grateful Dead fans, a Harry Connick Jr. aficionado, and a few rap fans," Erik said about the group's musical roots.

The fifth offering was a great crowd pleaser which included lead

vocals by Ian Varley and an imaginary volleyball game on a song from "The Wizard of Oz", "If I Only Had a Brain." The next number clearly showed the boys' creative and comical sides. As Jady Koch from Baton Rouge explained: "We decided to add a touch of spice and sex appeal to the old favorite, 'Shenandoah.'" There were three short, stylish spoofs on the song: a wild rock & roll mini-version, then an upscale classical zing, and finally a hilarious rap version with comical acting by Jady Koch and Jason Brown.

The crowd included many families. Eight year old Karen Fiero from Miami Beach even knew what a cappella was: "It's singing without musical instruments," she explained, not missing a beat. A good crowd from Camp Jabberwocky was seated up front, almost touching the stage. John Bartlett, a journalism graduate from Washington and Lee, dedicated song number 12 to the campers. I asked Jason Brown what makes a successful a cappella performer. "It's not enough to just sing well." he replied. "You have to entertain. People want to have fun and feel good. You have to captivate them."

Hats off to Bob Cleasby, the Tabernacle's director of programs, and to these talented performers. Vineyard Sound may be heard in Edgartown at the Seafood Shanty, 8 and 10 pm every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and in Edgartown at Nevin Square on Thursday at 7 pm.