



From small town to big time

Music group gets contract but doesn't forget the fans who supported them.

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July 15, 2005

A vocal group that recently signed with a national music label held a thank-you party for about 100 fans at the Olsen-Larsen Galleries in West Des Moines last week.

Tonic Sol-fa held the event to celebrate the quartets' contract with Vivaton, a division of Sony BMG, which is giving the group's new CD "Boston to Beijing" national exposure.

West Des Moines was chosen as one of a half-dozen sites for the CD release parties.

"The guys love coming here to Iowa," said Michelle Massman, the group's publicist. "We will also hold these in major cities like Minneapolis, but the guys like spending time in places where people have supported them. They have built up some loyal fans in the Des Moines area in the over 10 years they have been together. They are also very loyal to their fans that have helped them get where they are today."

The a cappella group has performed holiday shows at Hoyt Sherman Place and entertained at the Iowa State Fair over the years, Massman said. An Iowa stop was also important because two of the group's members, Shaun Johnson and Mark McGowan, are from the state. Johnson was raised in Algona and McGowan was raised in Sioux City.

Before the invitation-only party sponsored by radio station KLTJ (104.1), an autograph session for the group was held at the Valley Junction Farmers Market. The Tonic Sol-fa singers arrived in a black stretch limousine that cruised down the center of the blocked-off Fifth Street. Group members spent about an hour signing

autographs and performing a song for the shoppers before strolling to the gallery.

Sheryl Sexauer of Johnston bought a copy of the new CD and had group members autograph it. "I went to their Christmas show and heard them. They are great. When I heard they would be down here I just had to meet them," she said.

At the CD release party the group chatted with guests, many of whom won tickets to the event in a contest sponsored by the radio station. Tiffany Tauschek, who coordinated events for the radio station, said, "It is nice to see guys from small towns make good. We have been promoting them for two years now, and they are at a real turning point in their careers. We think they are really going to take off now."

One of the contest winners was an ecstatic Annette Hightshoe of Des Moines.

"I'm a big fan," she said. "I have been following them for five or six years. The first I ever saw them is when they performed for my company's Christmas party" at the Iowa Clinic, she said. "I have also seen their Christmas show. When I found out I won tickets I couldn't believe it."

Hightshoe and her husband, Jim, talked with group members and posed for pictures with them.

Then they retired to a back gallery where a sound system and about 25 folding chairs was set up to listen to a miniconcert from the group. The performers harmonized about a half-dozen songs for their guests.

"We have never performed so close to an audience before," group member Gregory Bannwarth said.

"Or so close to art," quipped group member Jared Dove.