

Tonic Sol-fa to perform this Sunday in Alexandria



Celeste Beam,
Staff Reporter
09/09/2005

For the past six years, a group of four musicians – all males – have been wowing crowds with their musical

Tonic Sol-fa will perform at St. Mary's Church in Alexandria this Sunday. talent all over the nation.

Although the group has been around for the last decade, it has only been together with the same four guys since 1999.

When they first began, the group played nearly 300 shows per year, once performing 52 shows in one month.

But now, the a cappella group Tonic Sol-fa has cut back – they try to perform about 10 shows each month. In addition, they have dozens of days spent traveling and touring around the states, as well as media appearances, recording schedules and business meetings.

They will be performing in Alexandria this Sunday, September 11 at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Alexandria at 2:30 p.m.

Tickets are on sale at Elden's Food Fair, Bremer Bank, Trumm Drug and Pete's County Market. Prices are \$12 for adults, \$8 for ages 12 and younger and free for kids ages 5 and younger. Tickets at the door will be \$15.

According to Michelle Massman, Tonic Sol-fa's vice president, being on the road has its ups and downs – just like any other profession.

"The people and the places the guys get to see and experience provide amazing memories," said Massman through an e-mail interview. "Planes have made it much easier

for Tonic Sol-fa to do what they love and still have quality time at homes with their families."

The "guys" Massman is referring to include Greg Bannwarth of Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Mark McGowan of Sioux City, Iowa; Jared Dove of Green River, Wyoming and Shaun Johnson of Algona, Iowa.

Two of the members – McGowan and Johnson – met while attending St. John's University near St. Cloud. They then met Bannwarth at a show in Brookings, South Dakota and then Dove met the group via a phone interview when they were looking for a bass singer.

Massman explained that the group asked people to call a number and sing their favorite song or a portion of the song and that Dove was the winner, so to speak.

None of Tonic Sol-fa's members have "regular" jobs, noted Massman.

From the beginning, the group made the decision to jump in head first, take everything that came their way and work toward fewer shows and greater choices, she added.

"Although they were eating mac and cheese for a few months, they stuck to their original goals and have become one of the most successful a cappella groups in the United States," said Massman.

Which is one of the reasons she said makes the group unique – the fact that they are an a cappella musical group.

She said the music is natural, basic and original. Not necessarily better, she added, but different than the thousands of bands that make up the music scene around the country.

"Tonic Sol-fa's music has considerable depth and their performances have garnered much praise," Massman said. "Most people are surprised at how entertaining and humorous the guys are while still delivering fantastic vocal harmony."

She said their music would best be described as contemporary a cappella with a mixture of original songs and cover songs

inspired by the groups eclectic musical tastes.

When asked what inspires the four men, Massman said mostly their families and loved ones, but also other successful, entrepreneurial small businesses.

"The guys believe in the power of the Midwestern work ethic," she added.

As for their musical idols, it depends on which member of the group is being asked. Massman said it ranges greatly – from Ray Charles and Lyle Lovett to U2 and Chopin.

Tonic Sol-fa loves to sing, she said, for the challenge and the beauty of it. She called singing a universal language.

"It's really a simple thing to sing, but such a complex matter to sing for people," she said.

Massman added that Tonic Sol-fa is excited to be performing in Alexandria once again – they have played here several times and were asked to come back for the St. Mary's Fall Festival.

One of the members – Johnson – has many friends from the St. Mary's parish and was "ecstatic" to be a part of the upcoming celebration, she said.

So, why should people in the area attend the concert?

Massman said that Tonic Sol-fa receives hundreds of letters from people who write to say how a song changed their life or how a performance turned their day around.

"The guys know their roles as entertainers is to do just that – entertain," she said. "Hopefully, this moves an audience, brings people closer – or at the very least, builds community."

Tonic Sol-fa's CDs – including the newly released *Boston to Beijing* – are available at all major outlets including Best Buy, Musicland, Borders, Wal-Mart, and online at iTunes, Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.

More information can be found on the group's Web site at www.tonicsolfa.com.