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Wednesday, December 11, 2013



Caps connect with BlackRock show

Capital Hearings hope to delight Montgomery County fans

By Cara Hedgepeth Staff Writer

"It's not just about the performance, it's about the connections," said singer John Hazangeles. "We're all about making connections. ..."

Hazangeles is the business manager for the Capital Hearings — or Caps as they call themselves — a Washington, D.C.-based a cappella group comprised of 12 classically-trained singers. The group will perform at BlackRock Center for the Arts for the first time on Sunday.

"When you say a cappella, it can mean 10 different things to 10 different people," Hazangeles said.

For Hazangeles and the Caps, a cappella means connecting with an audience with sometimes rather unconventional performances, such as in April 2011 when the group surprised lobbyists and members of Congress on Capitol Hill with a rendition of "America the Beautiful" during Arts Advocacy Day. Or the following month when the Capital Hearings staged a flashmob proposal on behalf of a young man for his unsuspecting girlfriend at Good Stuff Eatery on Capitol Hill. Or last year when the group did a second surprise rendition of "America the Beautiful" to open the American Institute of Architects National Convention. "[Surprise performances] have become one of our signature things," Hazangeles said.

The first Capital Hearing performance, however, was a planned one. It was a 2010 outdoor, pool-side concert at the Residence of the Deputy Head of Mission of the British Embassy for a Choral Arts Young Patrons event. The group had gotten its start just a few months earlier after Hazangeles, Caps music director Dileep Srihari and Carolyn Wise struck up a friendship as members of the Choral Arts Society of Washington.

"[It] started very innocently as a bunch of people getting together at someone's house," Hazangeles said. "It's a group that started out of musical curiosity."

All Capital Hearings members are trained vocalists and many come by way of some of the area's most renowned choral



Britt Olsen-EckerThe Capital Hearings, who make their Black Rock debut Sunday night, are all classically trained singers.



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professional people I've met in my life," Hazangeles said. "Knowing that we're part of a creative process together makes the relationship even more strong and even more special."

While the Capital Hearings tend to perform primarily in Washington, D.C., Hazangeles said the group is excited to expand into Montgomery County.

"Part of [this concert] was wanting to perform in Montgomery County," Hazangeles said. "We have a growing fan base [there]."

Hazangeles said the Caps are also excited for the opportunity to perform in BlackRock's Mainstage Theater.

"I have been an admirer of BlackRock and specifically the Mainstage Theater ..." Hazangeles said. "It has really, really wonderful acoustics. Normally if we were in a ... hall like that we would need to be mic'd, but at the Mainstage Theater it's almost sort of a church or cathedral acoustic. We can do more classical pieces in a way we would in a smaller setting."

When it comes time to choose songs for their holiday concerts, Hazangeles said it's always a little tricky.

"With holiday music, there's always a balance," he said.

While the group's repertoire committee typically meets before the holiday season to decide what pieces would be fun and challenging for the Caps, Hazangeles said there is "usually all kinds of interesting debate and discussion among the group.

Ultimately though, song selection comes back to the heart of the group: connections, with their audience and with each other.

"There's something really special about making music together," said Hazangeles, who also added the Caps greatly encourage audience participation. "There's something really remarkable about two or three or 12 voices coming together."

chedgepeth@gazette.net

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groups, including The 18th Street Singers, Choral Arts, and Cantate Chamber Singers. The group rehearses once every other week and more often during the holiday season.

According to Hazangeles, the Caps' repertoire includes "music of the Renaissance to Katy Perry." The set list for Sunday's concert at BlackRock is just as diverse, featuring everything from carols to classics like "Frosty the Snowman" and "Rudolph," to contemporary favorites such as Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You."

Capital Hearings members each hold separate professions, ranging from middle school music teacher to attorney to realtor and a handful of federal employees.

"Our members are some of the most interesting, ambitious



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