

PREHISTORY. The oldest of the existing a cappella groups at Cornell University (Tompkins Co, NY)[CORNELL] is Cayuga's Waiters (male), founded in 1949. There were older groups predating Cayuga's Waiters, but they were barbershop groups and the like, and certainly none of them are still in existence. Cayuga's Waiters, in fact, never even referred to itself as an a cappella group in its early days as a subset of the Glee Club (male) because it wasn't in those days. They used a piano and other instruments originally, and continued to use a guitar into the decade of the 2000's.

Likewise, the now-defunct group The Sherwoods (male) never called itself a cappella, either, and wasn't. The Hangovers, (male) in its early days, used instruments when it represented the Glee Club in microcosm, not becoming fully a cappella until possibly as late as the early 1980's. Similarly, when Nothing But Treble (female) was a part of the Chorus, it would give accompanied formal concerts from time to time, and did not become fully a cappella until it went independent of the Chorus (female) in 1988 or so.

Although many universities had bona fide a cappella groups quite early, Cornell didn't really adopt the trend until the 1980's when previously non-a cappella groups became a cappella. With this in mind, the first a cappella group that was founded as an a cappella group was The Touchtones (female) in 1983. The Class Notes (mixed) was next, founded later that same year.

I mention this because every so often someone suggests that The Class Notes was not the first mixed a cappella group at Cornell, that that distinction belongs to a now-defunct group from the 1950's called The Cornellaires (mixed). The Cornellaires was indeed mixed, drawing its members from the Glee Club and Chorus, but it, like the other groups at the time, was not a cappella, and actually had a pianist as part of the group.

The Class Notes is absolutely the first mixed a cappella group at Cornell.

THE FOUNDATION. The Class Notes was founded in 1983 by Justine Johnson, David Lefkowitz, and Tim Peierls. David and Tim were graduate students, David, a voice major, and Tim, an alumnus of the prolific a cappella scene of Yale University (New Haven Co, CT)[YALE]. Justine (Tina) was an undergraduate student at the time, although she later attended the Cornell Veterinary College. Their goal was to start a mixed-voice group (which was still a reasonably novel idea, though other Ivy League schools, such as Yale and Princeton University (Mercer Co, NJ)[PRINCETON], already had them). The original idea was to create a sort of blend between jazz and pop styles.

Finding a niche for mixed-voice a cappella was not always easy as there weren't really any popular choral ensembles for mixed voices; only the Sage Chapel Choir and the Cornell Chorale—which were more community organizations than student groups—provided mixed-voice singing. Even the Songs of Cornell book from that period contained no mixed-voice arrangements! Mixed-voice groups were still relatively rare in the national collegiate a cappella scene, and there was among many people an opinion (which still persists to some degree in the present) that men and women cannot develop a natural blend with each other and so mixed-voice groups would necessarily be inferior to the single-sex groups.

However, the group was always able to attract talented members and built, even in the early days, a reputation of excellence among its relatively narrow group of fans.

Over time, the jazz roots of the group were gradually phased out; the group has performed a repertoire of primarily recent pop for about fifteen years.

CUTTIN' CLASS AND THE CORNELL JAMBOREE. The Cornell Jamboree was established in the 1984-5 academic year as a concert featuring the active a cappella groups at that time: Cayuga's

Waiters, The Hangovers, Nothing But Treble, The Touchtones, and The Class Notes. Each group would perform for about twenty minutes.

In addition, The Class Notes had their own annual show, also established in the 1984-5 academic year: *Cuttin' Class*. Traditionally, each a cappella group had one major show a year, and the same concert name was used each year: Cayuga's Waiters had *Spring Fever*; The Hangovers had *Fall Tonic*; Nothing But Treble had *Spring Forward*; The Touchtones had *Off The Hook*.

Because Cayuga's Waiters and The Hangovers were the big draws of the event, Jamboree alternated between fall and spring semesters so that half the time The Hangovers could devote a whole semester to preparing for *Fall Tonic* and that half the time Cayuga's Waiters could do the same thing for *Spring Fever*. The Class Notes considered Jamboree to be a major show and so would schedule *Cuttin' Class* for whichever semester did not contain Jamboree.

Every group has fans, and there were always audience-goers who believed The Class Notes to have “won” Jamboree every single year; however, at Jamboree V in Fall 1988, The Class Notes received one of only two standing ovations that evening (the other going to Cayuga's Waiters). The Class Notes received a lot of popular press at that show, and this moved the group forward in the public eye.

THE FIRST ALBUM. Album recording was prohibitively expensive for most a cappella groups, at Cornell and everywhere, in the 1980's. At Cornell, only Cayuga's Waiters and The Hangovers among the active groups, had albums. Although The Class Notes was not able to afford the high costs of recording, the group received a generous long-term interest-free loan from the family of one of the members and so was able to record *Out On The Arts Quad* (1990). This album was, like all the collegiate a cappella albums, recorded around only a very small number of microphones, and mixed only subtly, giving it a natural or “raw” sound. The album takes its name from a song on the album, “Out On The Arts Quad,” a Class Notes original song, sung to “Under The Boardwalk,” extolling the virtues of relaxing on the Arts Quad with a frisbee on one of the rare sunny days in Ithaca. This album was released on cassette only, which was normal for the time. The Hangovers had not yet released an album on compact disc, and Cayuga's Waiters had only released one.

THE SUBSEQUENT ALBUMS. The Class Notes were fortunate to receive a loan for the production of the first album, but they couldn't count on such generosity forever. The group wanted its second album to be released on compact disc, but they did not have the funds to record a major album. So, The Class Notes released *Naturally* (1994), the second album, and the first on compact disc, as a compilation of live concert tracks from *Cuttin' Class* VII, VIII, and IX.

Although it would not be fair to say that recording has become cheap, modern technology has made the possibility of affordable, high-quality recordings available even to younger, less established, less affluent groups. As a result, The Class Notes has been able to release new studio-recorded albums every two or three years since 1994, albeit not without sacrifice and belt-tightening: *Destinations* (1996), *Break The Silence* (1998), *Afterhours* (2001), *Unfolded* (2004), *Hint Of Lime* (2007), *Black Tie Optional* (2010), *Full Disclosure* (2012). Most of the early albums take their name from a phrase in the lyrics of one of the included songs. However, *Hint Of Lime* was named in honor of James Bond, inasmuch as the album was introduced at the 2007 Classified concert (aptly named Classified '007).

ITHACAID AND CLASSIFIED. Ithacaid began in 1991 as a fraternity-sponsored charity concert. The Class Notes performed (along with the other a cappella groups) at this show. As a result of this show—which was always held in the fall semester—*Cuttin' Class* was held exclusively in the spring semester from this point on. The Class Notes of the era considered Ithacaid to be their “fall concert” and *Cuttin' Class* to be their “spring concert.”

In the late 1990's, The Class Notes started an annual fall concert of their own (at that time, the trend on campus was for the a cappella groups to host a concert each semester rather than one each year). This concert was originally called All For A Dollar, but, in 2000, the name was changed to Classified, presumably because The Class Notes wanted to charge more than a dollar for the show. Classified is still the name of annual fall concert and Cuttin' Class is still the name of the annual spring concert.

“ONLY YOU”. “Only You” is a song recorded by Yaz in 1982 (and bears no resemblance to the Platters song of the same name). It was covered in 1983 by the professional British a cappella group The Flying Pickets. This version reached number one on the British charts. Don Snow, a member of The Class Notes, arranged this song for the group during the 1986-7 academic year. Prior to this time, The Class Notes had no well-known signature tune, although there was an attempt, in the early jazz years, to establish “Ain't Misbehavin'” as such.

“Only You” was always popular with the fans, and, gradually, the song began being performed more and more frequently. By the mid-1990's, “Only You” became the signature song of the group, traditionally sung at the end of each major concert with alumni invited up from the audience.

“Only You” is the only song to appear on the first eight of The Class Notes' albums. *Full Disclosure* is the first album not to feature this song.

A CAPPELLA SONGS FROM HELL. A Cappella Songs From Hell is a popular tradition that has been a part of every Cuttin' Class since Cuttin' Class V in Spring 1989. Every year, The Class Notes performs snippets of songs that are too cheesy, trite, bubble-gummy, or otherwise annoying to be considered reasonable choices for the repertoire of a self-respecting a cappella group. The skit generally ends with performing one of these “bad” songs in its entirety. Over the years, a number of songs have been a part of the skit, such as “Wild Thing,” “Toxic,” and a selection of songs from *High School Musical*.

The tradition began as a one-shot intro to a turn-of-the-century classic “By The Light Of The Silvery Moon.” The Class Notes of that era absolutely needed to perform that song because of a dearth of available arrangements but were concerned about the reception the song would receive. A Cappella Songs From Hell was written to soften the blow, so to speak, that the next song wasn't going to be a “cool” one. The intro proved more interesting than the song and the tradition persists to this day.

TOUR. Traditionally, The Class Notes go on tour during Cornell's Spring Break, which usually occurs in mid-March, although there have been occasional years when the group has foregone the experience in order to budget more funds into recording or other projects. In the early days, Spring Break Tour was accomplished by caravan to destinations within relatively easy driving distance from Ithaca. The first Spring Break Tour involving air travel was the 1989 Los Angeles Tour. And, in 1996, The Class Notes made its first international tour, to Mexico, followed by a 1999 tour to Jamaica.

ICCA. The Class Notes has participated in the International Championship of College A Cappella many times. They did win some awards a few times:

2002: Mid-Atlantic Region Quarterfinal 3: first place; Runner-Up Best Arrangement (“Only You”)
2003: Mid-Atlantic Region Quarterfinal 2: Runner-Up Best Soloist (Emily Stein)
2005: Mid-Atlantic Region Divisional 2: fourth place.
2012: Mid-Atlantic Region Quarterfinal 3: first place; Outstanding Soloist (Maya Gunaseharan); Outstanding VP (Alex Martino)

THE PRESENT. As of 2013, The Class Notes is still going strong. One hundred eighty-five young men and women have been a part of this ensemble, and over the last thirty years have performed over three hundred distinct songs and have released seven albums. When The Class Notes began it was one of five a cappella groups on campus and the only mixed group. At present, there are thirteen a cappella groups at Cornell, three male, five female and five mixed, indicating the influence The Class Notes had and still has on the campus a cappella community.