

Treble on Huntington competes in ICCA quarterfinals

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By Alana Dore, deputy inside editor

Northeastern's all-female a cappella group Treble on Huntington competed in the first round of the quarterfinals of the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella (ICCA) at the Berklee Performance Center last Friday.

The ICCA is one of the largest organized a cappella competitions in the world. This year, over 300 groups will compete across the country. There are 45 groups competing in the Northeast region in a total of five quarter-final events, three of which will take place in Boston. All six of Northeastern's a cappella groups are competing in the ICCAs.

On Friday, Treble on Huntington competed against The CharlieChords (Berklee College of Music), Ithacappella (Ithaca College), L'Shir (University of Hartford), The Macaulay Triplets (Macaulay Honors College at the City University of New York), Mixed Emotions (Plymouth State University), The Harvard Opportunes (Harvard University) and S#arp Attitude (University of Massachusetts Amherst).

Each group had a 12-minute time limit and was judged on vocal performance, visual performance and subjective rank, with five judges scoring each team individually.

At the end of the night, the competition's top two groups were announced. Despite its best efforts, Treble on Huntington was not one of them, ending the groups ICCA run. The Harvard Opportunes came in second, while The CharlieChords took the Northeast Quarterfinal Championship.

“Every year we aim to compete with ourselves from the past,” Treble on Huntington’s Music Director Samantha Greenwald said. “This year we managed to out score ourselves by almost 100 points and in the process we have all become closer and more open with one another.”

The hosts of the night were Eileen O’Hara and Patrick “Paddy” Dennen, two members of a Boston-based semi-professional a cappella group Sound Off. The two performers made light of the intense competition throughout the night, interspersing the performances with jokes, praise of the competitors and readings of tweets tagged #ICCA.

Treble on Huntington was the second group of the night to perform. The girls took on an ambitious four-song set. Starting out with Katy Perry’s “Walking On Air,” the girls moved in sync with tightly choreographed steps but struggled with some of the higher notes in the song. The group then moved quickly into “Heartbreak Dream” by Betty Who, followed by Sam Smith’s “Stay With Me.” The former was forgettable, the latter bringing the girls to center stage through the growth of the song and the accentuation of its inherent soulfulness. The girls ended the way they started, with Ariana Grande’s “Problem,” an upbeat pop hit. The song featured soloist freshman environmental science major Josie Daniel and intense choreography.

“For next year, the group will keep finding songs and arrangements that play towards our strengths and hide our weaknesses,” Greenwald said. “But more importantly, we will keep fostering our relationship as a family and not just a singing group.”

Runner-up of the night, The Harvard Opportunes, opened with Christina Aguilera’s bold and brassy “Ain’t No Other Man.” The choreography was flirty, funny and well-rehearsed with a powerhouse performance by soloist Kat Kearney, earning her an award for Outstanding Vocal Soloist. The Opportunes’ next song, “I Choose You” by Sara Bareilles, was smooth and effortless. The arrangement featured smart pauses which highlighted the stirring lyrics. Its final song was an incredible mash-up of Beatles hits including: “Let It Be,” “I Wanna Hold Your Hand,” “Paperback Writer,” “In My Life” and “All You Need Is Love.” The inventive and dynamic mash-up where one song started and the next stopped.

The all-male Berklee CharlieChords formed in 2012. The group started dramatically off-stage with Ed Sheeran’s “I’m A Mess.” The group showed control over its sound with its impressive use of dynamics. The men then moved into the hushed tones of Bastille’s “Oblivion,” which ended in harmonized humming. The CharlieChords wrapped up its set with Sia’s “Chandelier,” demonstrating its command of the stage and leaving the audience with chills.

The all-male group from Ithaca College had a high-energy set, starting out the night with a rowdy and well-choreographed cover of Ed Sheeran’s “Sing” Ithacappella’s secret weapon was beatboxer Luke Harbur, who received an award for Outstanding Vocal Percussion.

Mixed Emotions started with Queen’s “Somebody To Love.” The group had a well-balanced sound and transitioned evenly through four other songs before ending with “Independent Women” by Destiny’s Child. The group finished with an original rap about girl power which was highly praised by ICCA Northeast Producer Emily Flanders.

The MaCaulay Triplets provided a change of pace to the night starting out with Alice Francis’ “Shoot Him Down.” The group jumped about the stage complementing the springy, jazzy track. Its other two songs, “Latch” by Disclosure and “Heartbeat” by Nneka, proved that the group had the most original setlist. Its dynamic performance was full and fun, deftly balancing the dark nature of all three songs with a levity only accessible through a comprehensive understanding of musical manipulation.

The last two groups of the night were the all-female S#arp Attitude and L’Shir. S#arp Attitude sang renditions of Jessie J’s “Bang Bang,” Tove Lo’s “Habits (Stay High)” and Beyoncé’s “Crazy In Love,” and, despite predictable arrangements, the group shined. L’Shir sang a set consisting of an Usher mashup, Ed Sheeran’s “Give Me Love” and yet another cover of Grande’s “Break Free.” Despite incredible vocals by soloist Sam Migneault, the group’s songs lacked depth and variation.

Despite its loss, Treble on Huntington is looking forward to next year.

“Every Northeastern group is seasoned when it comes to ICCA, but it is always easy to let the competition stress you out,” Greenwald said. “The best thing to do is to stay calm and remember why you joined an a cappella group in the first place: to have fun doing what you love to do.”

There are five Northeastern groups left to compete in the quarterfinal round: Distilled Harmony, The DownBeats, UniSons, Pitch, Please! and The Nor'easters, the 2013 ICCA Champions. If any of them place in the top two, they will continue on and may have the chance to compete in the ICCA Finals at Beacon Theatre in New York City.

Photo courtesy Samantha Greenwald