

# COVER STORY

## The Essentials

by Carrie Humphries  
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Acapellaish? Is that even a word? If not, it doesn't matter, because it does a better job of celebrating The Essentials' unique, talented-blasted genre than any adjective Webster's could give me. A modern twist on the barbershop quartet, The Essentials burst out of your stereo not unlike a modern version of Boyz II Men (if that's the best you can do when thinking of a cappella groups).

They're a four piece. They're certified gold. They have six records under their belt.

And they've made 'a cappella all their own' by defining it and breathing life into it. Now they'll be at the Registry on November 5 and 6 for your listening pleasure. "We try to keep our fans happy by releasing new albums, changing up our live show, updating our website and staying in contact with them on Facebook or with email," the band wrote to me in an email interview. "When our fans are happy, they are more likely to recommend us to their friends. In return, this widens the reach of our audience. Social media sites like our website, Facebook page, Myspace page, Twitter page, and YouTube Channel have enabled us to widen that reach even further." They go on to add that it's these types of sites that allow them to connect to their fans on a deeper level.

"One of the key elements to a loyal fan base is connecting with them, whether it's on a personal level or on a musical level. As long as our fans keep supporting us, we can continue doing what we love to do and hope for that day when we can say that we've made it, but only thanks to them."

Hailing Billy Joel, Frankie Valli and the Nylons as some of their top influences, The Essentials spread their music across fabulous covers such as "Takin' It To The Streets" and Christmas selections such as their version of "Little Drummer Boy". And as the critics hail them as one of the best a cappella projects, the band maintains that our patch of grass certainly breeds its own batch of great talent.

"The Essentials started in London, Ontario and now are based out of Toronto so we're a bit knowledgeable about the arts scene along that stretch of the 401, including K-W," they explain. "We think the talent level in this area is at an all-time high. We're not exaggerating either." They go on to add that "with computer and gear prices falling so drastically, artists are doing more work in home studios which allows them to inexpensively try different instrumental or vocal harmony parts, for example, by recording themselves once and then singing along with what they just recorded. We think this allows artists to grow quicker and just become generally more well-rounded musicians. The internet also allows people to co-write songs or collaborate on projects without even being in the same country." And as a testament to their commitment to seeking out new talent, two members of the band are judges for the Toronto Independent Music Awards.

"Some of the K-W artists that have literally and figuratively made a lot of noise at the TIMA's include electronica artist Amber Long," the band boasts about the region. "Also, even though she lives in Toronto now, soul singer Lori Nuic is also from the Tri-Cities area. Lori's career took off with her last album and now she's in the studio recording another. If you don't know these talented people, Google them! And while you have Google open, check out more K-W area talent and search for Damon Alexander and the 10 Cent Rentals for an interesting twist on punk." But when they aren't praising the work of their peers, The Essentials are on the front line wowing the crowds with their exceptional talent, including being asked to perform the national anthem. "It's important for musical acts to distinguish themselves with their recorded material as well as their live show," the band says about their live performances for audiences. "Most acts have instruments. We're an a cappella group, so we don't. This is the key differentiator between us and 99 per cent of the acts out there. We're not scared to do popular covers, but we make them our own because we're singing them without instruments and we create our own unique arrangements."

They go on to explain the diversity of the members of the band. "We have three lead singers, each with different vocal qualities, style, and influences. This gives our audiences a lot of variety and opens up a whole world of possibilities when choosing new music for our shows, even more so since we recently added a girl (Janet) to a formerly all-male act," they say, continuing, "Being instrument-less and not having a lot of technical requirements means that we're pretty flexible in the types of shows that we can do. We've performed at every type of venue imaginable...from stadiums to living rooms. Regardless of where we're playing though, our stage show stays pretty much the same."

With shows including performing the anthem at a Toronto Raptors game at the Air Canada Centre and taking their tour down through our neighbours to the south, be sure to mark your calendars for The Essentials at the Registry Theatre for an exclusive two-night engagement. "Our message is simple," they finish: "If you truly love music then don't let anybody talk you into stopping what you're doing. Keep improving your songwriting, musicianship, networking, and performance skills. If you don't love music and are doing this because you think fame and fortune are sure to follow, get out now. The path is difficult and you're just getting in the way of the rest of us!"

THE ESSENTIALS  
November 5th & 6th, Registry Theatre  
essentialsmusic.com



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