Community Singing in the Age of Coronavirus: The Case of Collegiate A Cappella

Collegiate a cappella gained popularity in the United States during the twentieth century and expanded internationally by the turn of the twenty-first through recordings and live performance competitions. As a genre and practice in which college-aged singers rehearse and perform popular songs without accompaniment by emulating instrumental sounds, it occupies a particular place in singers’ lives. By participating, group members gain not only opportunities for performance but also social support during a critical period of transition in their lives: college.

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced many colleges to offer virtual classes and discourage campus residency, opportunities for the support that membership in an a cappella group once provided would seem to have vanished. Yet many groups found new ways to make music and maintain social ties in this new, mediated world. This talk draws on research in progress that examines the ways socio-musical practices have shifted during the pandemic, utilizing new ethnographic interviews to build on existing research in ethnomusicology and music education. It ultimately concludes that a cappella groups have embraced virtual forms of musicking precisely because of the value they place on the creation and maintenance of community.

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Joshua S. Duchan, Ph.D. is an ethnomusicologist specializing in American popular music. His research has considered collegiate a cappella music and the music of singer-songwriter Billy Joel. Dr. Duchan’s books include Powerful Voices: The Musical and Social World of Collegiate A Cappella (2012), Billy Joel: America’s Piano Man (2017), and “We Didn’t Start the Fire”: Billy Joel and Popular Music Studies (2020). He is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Music.

Tuesday, February 9, 2021
12:30PM—1:30PM
Join us on Zoom at:
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