

THE ALLEY CATS

The Do Re Mi's of Doo Wop

Art Form: Music

Style: 50s Era A Cappella Vocals

Culture: United States of America

MEET THE ARTIST:

The Alley Cats are a perfect blend both vocally and personally. *Royce Reynolds*, whose solid bass vocals create the Cats' musical foundation, and *Mando Fonseca*, the second tenor always ready with a pun or quick quip, have an easy familiarity which makes their camaraderie and vocal play radiate from the stage. Talented baritone *Juan Del Castillo*, whose smooth, rich vocals charm audiences the world over, and *Sean Devine*, re-creator of all those soaring first tenor lines of the 50s, bring their freshness and talent to a solid foundation of a cappella tradition. The Alley Cats joined as a group in 1987 at Fullerton College in Southern California, and began their musical journey with Disney's "Blast to the Past" salute. The Cats have appeared at fairs and festivals around the country and have been featured performers on stages at Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, and at the White House. The Alley Cats' first disc of 50s classics, *The Cat's Meow*, and their newest release, *Strike 3*, continue a tradition of Doo-Wop at its best.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

By bringing their own contemporary style to the tunes from the 50s and 60s, The Alley Cats present a fun, interactive and informative assembly. Students will learn about the unique American musical form called doo-wop when they hear "At The Hop." The audience hears four-part harmony and learns about each vocal part and its job in the total sound of the music produced. Members of The Alley Cats discuss and demonstrate pitch, tempo and rhythm and how these elements are manipulated to create a particular effect in a song. "Rockin Robin" demonstrates rhythm, while "In the Still of the Night" is sung to emphasize the impact of tempo. The Alley Cats combine various elements of music in "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," and then present the popular standard, "Blue Moon." Tight harmonies, humor and dynamic a cappella energy make The Alley Cats one of America's premier doo-wop groups.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

A *cappella*, meaning singing without musical accompaniment, is the oldest form of music. Tribal Chant, Gregorian Chant, Gospel, Jazz, Barbershop, Doo-Wop, and Contemporary music all trace their roots to a cappella. During the 1950s, young men and women began forming singing groups in their neighborhoods. Street corner singing soon became the hits of the day and Doo-Wop was born. Doo-Wop is a type of rhythm and blues popular in the 1950s and 60s using nonsense syllables in intricate, harmonic arrangements. Classic examples are "Earth Angel" by the Penguins and "Sh-Boom" by the Chords. The groups eventually helped establish Motown. The first real boy bands, before N'Sync and the Backstreet Boys, were Doo-Wop groups like the Del Vikings, and Dion and The Belmonts, and in the Motown era, The Temptations, Four Tops and Miracles. These groups laid the foundation for the music we hear today.

The fifties were a happy time in America; World War II was over, and *I Like Ike* was the phrase of the time. People felt safe and secure. The music of the fifties is still enjoyed by many people of all ages; it is truly timeless. Today Doo-wop is more widely known as oldies and rarely is heard in the a cappella form. The music is enjoyed all around the world.

Early on, what we called doo-wop music embraced the grand tradition of nonsense lyrics. Taking their cue from Dizzy Gillespie's 1947 be-bop song, "Oop Boop Sh'Bam," vocal groups sang "Sh-Boom," "Oop Shoop" and "Bip Bam," all using meaningless sounds to fill the beats and create background chants. But perhaps the most common nonsense syllable was "doo," which has always been useful in popular songs. Over 150 years ago, composer Stephen Foster used "doo-dah, doo-dah" to fill out the verses of

his "De Camptown Races" (1850). A hundred years later a black vocal group called The Sliders crooned "doo-doo-da-doo-doo" behind Savannah Churchill on her "When You Come Back to Me." The first hit record showcasing "doo-wop" came in 1955 with The Turbans' Top 40 recording of "When You Dance."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite song from the show? Explain why it was your favorite.
- When did you realize there were no instruments?
- What differences did you notice between the two performances of The Lion Sleeps Tonight ?
- This music was popular in the 1950s. What else do you know about that time period?
- Is there anything else you would like to learn about a cappella or Doo-Wop? Describe.

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC. STUDIES:

Take some time to discuss the 1950s era in the United States. Have the children make guesses as to the styles of clothing, toys and activities of the children back then. Have students ask family members who lived during the 50s what life was like then and how it was different from life now. Use the following as a possible framework for a take-home questionnaire.

- What kind of clothes did you wear?
- What was your favorite song?
- Where did you go for fun?
- What kind of toys did you have?
- Who served as the President? What years?
- What was in the news?
- Do you know what Doo-Wop is?
- What were your favorite dances?
- Types of food?

Make a chart and graph to compare the answers and find trends and popularity of certain answers. Have the children answer the same questions for today and make another chart with their answers. Discuss the results.



Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- 👉 Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Take time to sing in class and remind the students that they are singing a cappella. A student's birthday is an excellent opportunity to reinforce the meaning of a cappella.
- 🌀 Have each student sing as high and low as they can. Ask them if they think they are a baritone, soprano, alto or tenor. Who sings lowest? Who sings highest?

WORD SEARCH

Q A C C A P E L L A P Q
D A V E P I O I M O F U
O E L L G T Z Q U A I A
O P M W U C B A S S P R
W B P H F I F T I E S T
O H A R M O N Y C A L E
P S T R V H H Y L N O T
P S W O I C O F A J W O
J O H N T T E M P O K L
L Y S I N G O S N A P D
P G P E G M A N D O W I
A R H Y T H M O E K N E
T H E A L L E Y C A T S
J C F O U R P A R T R L

A CAPPELLA	HARMONY	DOOWOP
BASS	BARITONE	MUSIC
RHYTHM	CLAP	PITCH
FIFTIES	TEMPO	LOW
SLOW	FAST	SING
SNAP	OLDIES	FOUR PART
QUARTET	HIGH	

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VOCABULARY:

Look up the following words and their definitions. Share and discuss them with the class.

A cappella	rhythm	tempo
harmony	fifties	pitch
baritone	bass	tenor
doo-wop	music	lyrics

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Rosalsky, Mitch. *Encyclopedia of Rhythm & Blues & Doo Wop Vocal Groups*. Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Brinbin, Anthony J. and Schiff, Matthew M. *The Complete Book of Doo Wop*. Krause Publications, 2000.

www.thealleycats.com