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A CAP



PELLA

Foreword by BEN FOLDS



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A CAPPELLA POP

A Complete Guide to Contemporary A Cappella Singing

By Brody McDonald

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SETTING THE STAGE



Quinta and a Half

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF CLASSICAL A CAPPELLA

By Joshua Habermann

In the beginning was a cappella. Long before there was any written history, there was singing; and there is every reason to believe that it was unaccompanied. The voice is, after all, the original instrument, coming built-in at birth. Though it's impossible to look back at those very early times, we can imagine that singing played a central role in communication and expression in pre-literate communities.

As societies became more organized, music came to be "institutionalized." Both church and state understood and made full use of its power. Unaccompanied singing played a significant role in the singing of the psalms in Jewish worship, and in the various forms of chant that developed in the early Christian church. These devotional melodies were monodic: a single melody without accompaniment. Many of these chants have survived to this day, and are some of the most beautiful melodies we have.

As invariably happens, over time people began to experiment. In the Middle Ages chants of various kinds were set, first against a static drone, and later against another moving line, moving first parallel and then independently of the original. With each innovation the texture of the music grew more complex, until the cultural flowering of the renaissance increased the rate of change significantly. In the early renaissance there was a move towards greater complexity as sacred and secular melodies were woven together, sometimes even resulting in songs in which the voices were in different languages.

The focus of this music was not yet on harmony (chords), but on fitting melodies together in a complementary and skillful way. At this time, instruments were creeping into the sacred music, and there was a certain interchangeability in which one line of a composition might be taken by a singer, while another might be taken by an instrumentalist. Nonetheless the voice was still the model, especially in the sacred music of the time, and composers sought to write melodies that sat well for the voice.

As we turn into the middle and late renaissance the trend is toward more parts, and a concept of equality among them. This was the flowering of polyphony, in which rather than having one