

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

LoudounNow



Tyreke Anderson takes part in Loudoun County Public Schools' annual A Cappella Workshop Saturday. (Loudoun Now/Danielle Nadler)

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Hundreds of Students Lend Voices to Today's A Cappella Performance

2016-01-09 2016-01-11 Danielle Nadler 0 Comment

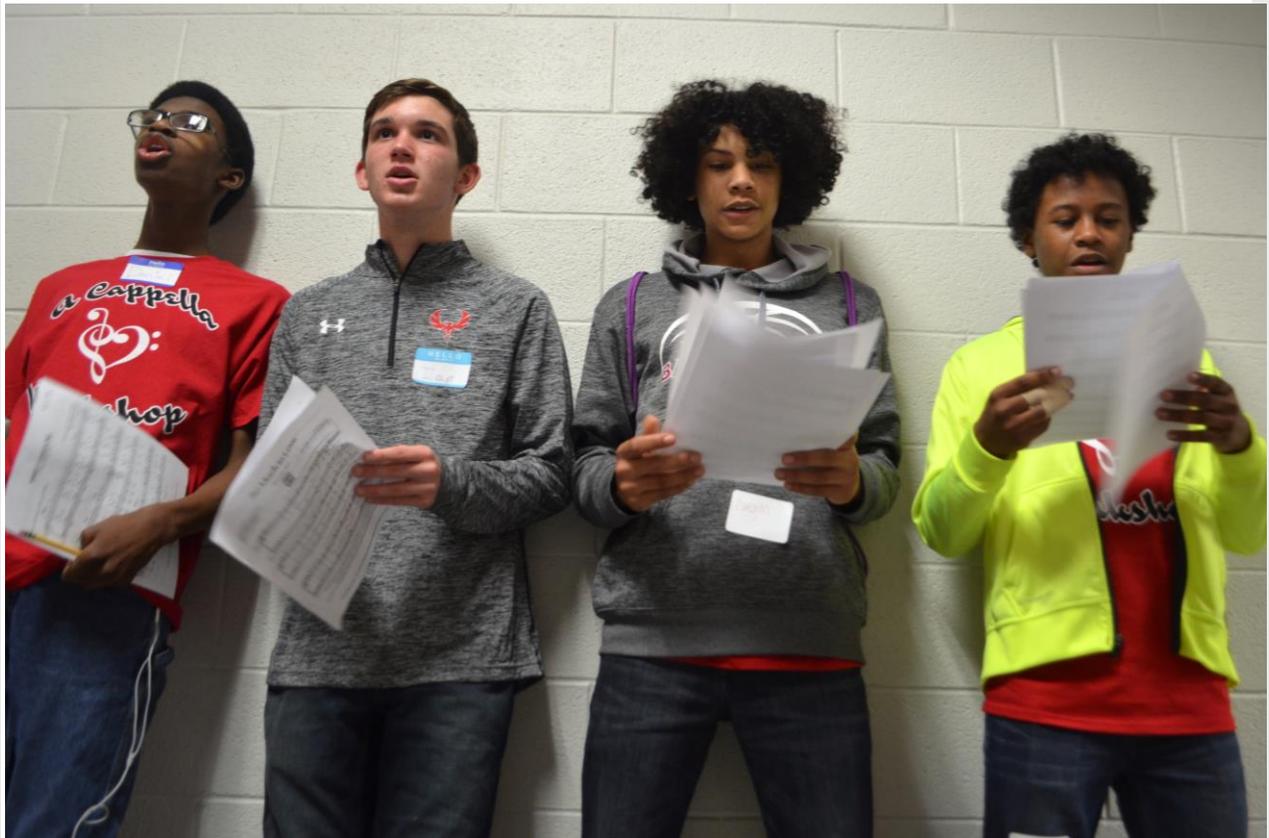
Two hundred Loudoun teens decided to forgo sleeping in and even skip sporting events today to experience a style of music that traces its origins back to the 19th century.

Sean Matthews told his basketball teammates they'd have to compete without him.

“I’d rather be here,” the Sterling Middle School eighth-grader said of missing a game to take part in Loudoun County Public Schools’ annual A Cappella Workshop.

The workshop gave middle and high school students a crash course in barber shop-style singing, and, for the day, it made Rock Ridge High School look like a scene from the TV show “Glee.” Troupes of young sopranos, altos, tenors and bass huddled around veteran barber shop performers for nearly five hours.

“We haven’t even been working on this song for long and you can just tell that it’s going to be something special,” Matthew Chestnutt, a Sterling Middle School eighth-grader, said at the start of the rehearsal.



Loudoun high school students rehearse the bass part ahead of their performance Saturday. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)

Matthew said shows like NBC’s “The Sing-Off” first sparked his interest in barber shop-style singing. He first attended Loudoun’s A Cappella Workshop last year, and he returned this year. “A lot of people are getting interested in this. It’s such a cool thing to create such great sound without instruments.”

The effort to introduce Loudoun’s young singers to a capella and barber shop-style singing started about five years ago. For a full year, the all-county choir—made up of Loudoun’s top student singers—focused on that 150-year-old genre.

“The kids really loved it,” said Jordan Markwood, fine arts chair at Rock Ridge High School in Brambleton. “We wanted to open it up to more students so we decided to start an annual workshop. It’s an opportunity for students to experience a kind of music that they may not experience in a typical school choir.”

The workshop has filled up every year since.



John David Maybury, director of the A Cappella Workshop, gives feedback to Rock Ridge High School student JD Maxey. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)

Markwood and other educators with Loudoun County Public Schools partner with three a cappella groups to put on the daylong event. On Saturday, the boys were led by members of the local men’s barbershop and a cappella quartets LoCo 4 and the Chorus of the Old Dominion, and the girls were under the direction of HALO, a DC-based women’s quartet and the first all African-American quartet to compete at the international level with a barbershop organization.

Dick Smull, a longtime bass in the barber shop quartet Chorus of the Old Dominion, said it’s rewarding to see teens as young as 13 flock back to school on a Saturday to sing.

“If you want that style of singing to survive, you have to grow it from the bottom,” he said. “We need youth to get involved and find out how much fun they can have doing this. They’re our future.”

Today’s rehearsals will culminate in a concert at 4 p.m. that includes performances by the guest quartets and students under the direction of John David Maybury. It is free and open to the public and takes place at Rock Ridge High School, 43460 Loudoun Reserve Drive in Ashburn.



Middle school students take part in Saturday's A Cappella Workshop. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)



John David Maybury, director of the A Cappella Workshop, leads a group of tenors. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)



Frank Shipp, with the Chorus of the Old Dominion, sings along side middle and high school students.



Middle and high school students take part in Saturday's A Cappella Workshop. (Danielle Nadler/Loudoun Now)