

# ROCK



**CELEBRATING 16 YEARS OF GOOD MUSIC, GOOD TIMES AND GOOD FRIENDS, THE LIMESTONES ARE STILL GOING STRONG — AND GIVING BACK.**

By Patricia Grotts Kelly '77    PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM ROSTER



**T**o meet girls, have fun and sing.” Those were the goals, says Brent Cataldo ’92, when he got together in the spring of 1989 with his fellow sophomores and buddies from Viking Chorus, Jed Anderson ’92 and Ben Lunstad ’92, to form a student-run, all-male a cappella group called the Limestones.

They started with a simple sound — barbershop and doo-wop tunes sung in the stairwells of Ellingson Hall — and a simple agenda: performing for such touchstones of the cultural calendar as the 1990 Chemistry Department Awards Banquet.

Over the next four years, they met some girls (not many, Cataldo recalls with a laugh) and performed for a growing base of loyal fans. Eight of the nine Limestones were seniors in 1992, and they couldn’t bear to see the group disappear after graduation. So they put up signs around campus, advertising Limestones auditions. By that evening, after 20 or so hopefuls had tried out, the next generation of the Limestones was in place. And so it has continued, every year, for 16 years.

Today, the Limestones are a nine-member vocal band with a polished sound, a website and a busy performance schedule — on campus and off. Last September 30, the group reached a milestone: the first-ever Limestones reunion concert and the successful funding of the ensemble’s first-ever scholarship, the Limestones/Bob Gilhoi Endowed Scholarship.

The reunion concert, held in the Pause, welcomed a standing-room-only crowd of at least a thousand fans. Twenty-eight Limestones returned to join the nine current Limestones on stage. Proceeds from the sale of tickets, T-shirts and the Limestones’ compilation CD, *Geology*, all went to fund the scholarship.

The brainchild of the original Limestones, the scholarship honors Bob Gilhoi ’62, an ardent Limestones fan who died in

2002. Bob’s son, Jay Gilhoi ’92, who roomed with Brent Cataldo in college, composed the Limestones’ signature song, “Cream of Wheat.” Starting in the fall of 2006, plans call for the \$25,000 scholarship to go to a male student who participates in music activities, regardless of major. The student’s financial need will be taken into account.

With the scholarship, the Limestones truly have become greater than their parts. Chris Aspaas ’95, a former member of the Limestones, is now an assistant professor of choral/vocal music at St. Olaf. “I don’t know that we were *un*-philanthropic before,” he says, “but our priorities were to sing cool music and get girls to scream and really have this kind of fun, teenage, college experience. This is such a mature step, and it shows amazing leadership. It blows me away.”

### A COLLEGE CRAZE

When Anderson, Cataldo and Lunstad created the Limestones, they joined a movement that was sweeping the country. Starting in the late 1980s and continuing through the ’90s, male a cappella groups (modeled after Yale University’s famous Whiffenpoofs) were the rage at colleges large and small. The St. Olaf students named their group in honor of their stony surroundings. Other names were considered: Exit 69 (already taken by a Carleton group), the

**“I CAME TO ST. OLAF FOR THE MUSIC, AND THE LIMESTONES. DURING OUR YEAR IN VIKING CHORUS, 10 TO 15 GUYS CAME TO ST. OLAF BECAUSE OF THE LIMESTONES.” — Pete Hoffman ’04**





Heismans (named for the Heisman Trophy's stiff-arm pose, which reminded the founders of the pose struck by girls who refuse you) and the Cannon River Boys.

"Someone's dad had a copy of 'Goodbye, My Coney Island Baby,'" says Anderson. "And we'd heard groups like the Nylons and Rockapella. We sang staples like 'Stand By Me,' 'Under the Boardwalk,' 'Moondance.' Pop. Fun. Barbershop. No gospel. No classical. Just kind of whoever dragged a song in and had some parts for it." (The Limestones also borrowed music from the Bison Chips, an a cappella group at Bucknell University to which Ben Lunstad's brother belonged.)

The Limestones' legendary "Cream of Wheat" song was the brainchild of Cataldo and Gilhoi. The young men were living in Ellingson when they ventured upstairs to chat with some girls. While visiting with student Lisa Gring (eventual wife of an original Limestone), they noticed a box of Cream of Wheat in her room. Says Gilhoi: "It seemed strange and, in fact, *wrong* since we were living in the town where the scent of Malt-O-Meal continually filled the air. It just had to be some sort of bad omen."

Gilhoi returned to his room, inspired to create a masterpiece. "I have no delusions about the song being any sort of impressive composition," he says today. "But I'm flattered that the Limestones continue to sing it."

The Limestones' first performance was at the 1990 father-son banquet. And they sang around campus — in the Pause, in first-year dorms, on the steps of Boe Memorial Chapel. When President Mel George heard them the first time, he became one of their biggest fans and supporters. The Limestones were frequent guests at the president's house and in administrative offices, singing for assorted dignitaries and the Board of Regents.

"Their music was about as close to Mozart as pop music gets," says President George, who hosted a reception for the reuniting Limestones last September. "For my generation, it was quite nice. And all of the Limestones I've known have been really nice young men. There's a universal appeal to their music and a decency and a good cheer about them that represents St. Olaf very well."

**A NIGHT TO REMEMBER:** With more than a thousand people in attendance and a goal to raise money for a new St. Olaf scholarship, the Limestones' reunion concert in September was a feel-good event all around. At right, Dave Parker '01 serenades a member of the audience.



**"THE LEVEL AND QUALITY OF MUSICIANSHIP HAS GONE THROUGH THE ROOF. THESE GUYS ARE UNBELIEVABLY TALENTED."** — Chris Aspaas '95

In the spring of '92, the original Limestones cut their first CD, *Don't Take Us for Granite*. "We did the whole album in one take, four hours," says Anderson. "It was hilarious." They handed what little money they'd earned to the next generation of Limestones — paving the way for great things to come.

### VOCAL PERCUSSION

"I think we were good singers, but we were pretty stiff on stage," says Brent Cataldo. "Our friends all said, 'You guys need to loosen up!' And we said, 'But how do we *sound*?'"

Today's Limestones are anything but stiff, thanks in large part to the addition of "vocal percussion" (drum sounds made with the mouth and microphone) that drives and distinguishes every song. Pete Hoffman '05 credits vocal percussion with "moving us past the standing still and snapping. It really took us to the next level as far as entertainment and the type of show we put on."

At September's reunion concert, the Limestones presented an amusing history of vocal percussion — starting with an early Limestone standing perfectly still, proceeding to a single finger-snapper and ending with performances of the complex "mouth drumming" that has become a Limestones standard.

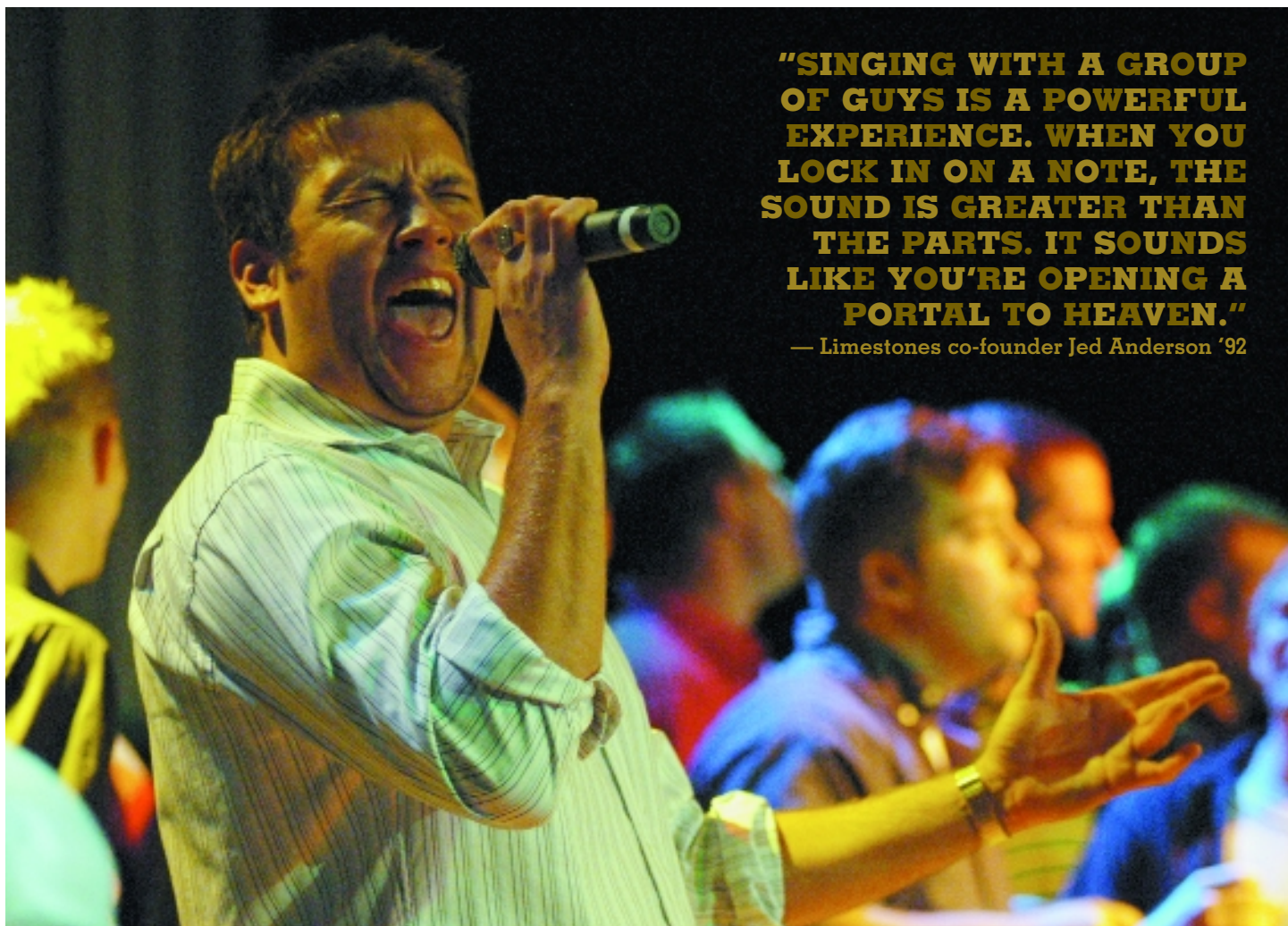
Fellow Limestones laud Aron Accurso '01 as a pioneer of vocal percussion, but he is reluctant to take full credit. "We weren't the first Limestones group to do it," he says. "But we put a lot of effort into it."

When the Limestones opened for various professional a cappella groups (M-Pact, Blind Man's Bluff, the Blenders), Accurso and Mark Stover '01 would hang around with the vocal percussionist after the show. "We'd ask, 'How do you make this sound? How about this one?' We learned by talking to other people, and spitting a lot!"

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**"SINGING WITH A GROUP OF GUYS IS A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE. WHEN YOU LOCK IN ON A NOTE, THE SOUND IS GREATER THAN THE PARTS. IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE OPENING A PORTAL TO HEAVEN."**

— Limestones co-founder Jed Anderson '92

**BIG SOUND.** Unlike most collegiate a cappella groups, which average 10 to 15 members, the Limestones currently follow the more "professional" model of having only five to seven members at any given time. Above, Mike Espinoza '01 locks in on a high note.

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Each new Limestones group has made its mark: Accurso's Limestones expanded beyond the St. Olaf campus and entered the college a cappella circuit, performing at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2001. Andy Johnson '04 and Pete Hoffman '04 say their era focused on educating the younger generation. "We performed a lot at high schools and junior highs," says Johnson. "There's something about male singing that is so appealing, but for younger guys, it's not cool, really."

Johnson and Hoffman both view the Limestones as a recruiting tool for St. Olaf. Johnson, a Northfield native, grew up watching the Limestones. Hoffman remembers the Limestones coming to his high school in Appleton, Wisconsin. "My Dad bought me the *Set in Stone* CD," he says. "I came to St. Olaf for the music, and the Limestones. I know that during our year in Viking Chorus, 10 to 15 guys came to St. Olaf because of the Limestones."

With each generation, too, comes talent — lots of talent. When Chris Aspaas returned

to St. Olaf this fall, as a conductor and professor, he hadn't seen or heard the Limestones for several years. "The level and quality of overall musicianship has just gone through the roof," he says. "These guys are unbelievably talented, all of them. Every last one of them."

#### GOOD MUSIC, GREAT CAUSE

Thanks to the reunion concert's considerable financial boost, the Limestones are on a roll — and setting their sights on a \$250,000 endowment for the Bob Gilhoi scholarship. "As they say in Texas, it's better to aim at the stars and miss than aim at a cow pie and hit it," says Limestones co-founder Jed Anderson, who now lives in Houston.

The Limestones continue to be a student-run, self-financing organization. "We've always taken pride in the fact that we were separate from the official music department umbrella," says Andy Johnson with a grin. (Johnson's parents, Sigrid and Bob, are both longtime members of the St. Olaf music department: she as an artist-in-residence and conductor of the Manitou Singers, the first-year women's group; he as manager of

St. Olaf Music Organizations.)

The scholarship deliberately is slated for a male student who appreciates music but intends to pursue another career. From the beginning, the Limestones have included young men with varied interests and majors. Founders Anderson, Cataldo and Lunstad are now an attorney, a dentist and a bio-chemist, respectively.

"To meet on our own and put together our own music: It was that sense of fraternity that was really unique to the Limestones, and still is," says Aspaas, who conducts the Viking Chorus for first-year men. "I think there's just a vibe about guys singing together."

"For me, singing with a group of guys has been one of my most powerful experiences," says Jed Anderson. "When you lock in on a note, all of a sudden you can just hear the sound that is greater than the parts. It sounds like you're opening a little portal to heaven, and that sound is just reverberating up there, and it comes back to you — not even as sound, but as a feeling of utter joy." ■

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