

The most recent iteration of Hyannis Sound in 2023, donning their signature pastel look. Courtesy of Nolan Roche

# Homecoming: a cappella group Hyannis Sound returns to Woodstock

**By Aaron Rubin**
Standard Correspondent

It has been four years since the Cape Cod-based a cappella group Hyannis Sound brought their harmonizing voices to the Upper Valley. But the group will return stronger than ever with current members and alumni performing a show at the Woodstock North Chapel on Saturday, March 23 that will explore a repertoire of standards and new material sung across their 30 year history.

The return to the area marks another chapter in "a tradition that is deeply rooted in the history of the group," said alumnus Nolan Roche. "In the first few years of the group, a few of the members were actually from Vermont, New Hampshire and even some directly from the Upper Valley, and wanted to come home and perform some shows in the offseason."

These homecomings that brought together former and current members became an annual tradition, performing in towns like Woodstock and Dartmouth, N.H., added Roche, and is a tradition that will make its comeback on March 23. For alumnus Marc Whittington, participating in that tradition has a personal element, as the singer discovered Hyannis Sound while attending Hanover High School. He said he "wanted to be a part of singing with the Sound or watching the Sound or connecting with what they were doing in some way."

Hyannis Sound was founded in 1994 by Townsend Belisle, who decided to put together a 10-piece male a capella group that would perform across Cape Cod peninsula during the summer. They also began performing in the Upper Valley, including Belisle's hometown of Woodstock.

The group persisted as their reputation and connections with audiences grew, snowballing into a professional choir that has recorded 15 albums and garnered critical acclaim. Members have performed at Carnegie Hall and collaborated with some of the biggest musical stars on the planet.

"That's a level that '94 couldn't have dreamed of," said Whittington.

Even when the pandemic put a halt on all live performances, the harmonies of Hyannis Sound couldn't rest. While living together in the house all the members share, the group decided to put together a virtual concert series, which grew in popularity over TikTok until it caught the attention of a particularly famous singer.

"Glamour Magazine reached out to us and wanted to do a video where they have artists react to covers of their songs," said Jordan Rubenstein, a member and the group's musical director. "We had done a cover of Alicia Keys' 'Fallin.' It had blown up on TikTok and so they saw that and thought that was kind of cool and showed it to Alicia. She responded and then we responded to that and it sort of started this relationship whereby at the start of summer of 2021, she called us in for a collaboration and the social media 'investment' continued."



A photo from one from the very first weekends in Woodstock in March 1996. The group performed at the Woodstock Inn, and have returned to town multiple times since. Courtesy of Rob Stewart

But for what was undeniably a high mark for the group, Rubenstein said "the real pride and joy" of Hyannis Sound is live performances like the one they will be bringing back to Woodstock.

"We love to sing and we love to do it for people in person," he said. "Spring Tour is a really lovely tradition to bring back because this is allowing us to connect with this audience in person again that we haven't been able to connect with since 2019."

The joy of performing before an audience to make a palpable musical connection is what Whittington describes as the "bread and butter" of Hyannis Sound. Their collective musical strength is harnessed by an experience of immersion, said Roche, as members will live together in a house during the peak performing months in the summer, building bonds through music.

"The 10 guys in the group do everything together for three months straight over the course of the summer — live together in a house, eat together, spend hours of time in rehearsal together each week, go eat out together, go grocery shopping together, you name it," explained Roche. "What I think that does is it creates this really genuine, experiential line of moments from which to draw and from which to build chemistry."

These kinds of experiences allow for Hyannis Sound to be a "conglomeration of the best ideas and talents from around the country" and one that separates it from the countless number of a capella groups across the country, said Roche.

**IF YOU GO**

**Hyannis Sound a cappella**
**Saturday, March 23 at 6 p.m.**
North Chapel, Woodstock
Free and open to the public

Combining different experiences and backgrounds is also a big part of the Hyannis Sound identity, said alumnus Jason Berk. "Of course, we're looking for good singers, but we're also looking for general entertainers, who are really funny in between songs and can get the audience to sit on a level beyond just the music," Berk explained. "You get guys who are super genuine and kind-hearted and make real-life connections with audience members outside of shows that last for years. When you get a tour, it's like a little bit of a family reunion of getting together and seeing folks you haven't seen in five, seven, 10 years."

Those moments of humor also reveal a group not taking themselves too seriously but still in tune with one another. "I think that those weird moments that come from just spending so much time together. [It] just breeds this sort of natural chemistry and charisma that comes from the guys that, I think otherwise, you wouldn't get in a college group," said Roche.

Along with supporting musical development for its members, Hyannis Sound "provides the ultimate coming of age experience for college-aged singers," said Roche.

Some of its members assume the roles of musical director, like Rubeinstein, who also serves as operations and business manager, "allowing for a delegation-based approach to executing the daily tasks of the business aspect of the group and giving each member the chance to grow and develop professionally in areas such as managing the group's finances, social media accounts, event planning, web presence, and client relations," Roche said.

He added, "The members leave the group with invalu-

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Hyannis Sound has performed multiple times in Woodstock, like here at North Chapel in 2019. Courtesy of Nolan Roche