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## SPECTACLE

### The Bobs: A Capella for All

By Joshua S. Diamant  
*Columbia Summer Spectator*

The Bobs are probably one of only three a cappella groups whose CDs can be found in most record stores (the others being British imports, the King's Singers and the Swingle Singers). This is a testimony to the quartet's quality and originality. Their new album, *Coaster*, is a stunner.

While the album starts off unpromisingly with a pointless vocal-trumpet cover of Duke Ellington's "Caravan", every other track combines the Bobs' flawlessly tuned, distinctively nasal vocal blend with harmonically and melodically rich pop songs and wildly creative lyrics. New member Amy Bob Engelhardt penned the album's finest track, "Bring to Boil." Set to an unpredictable whole-tone melody, "Bring to Boil" is a pun-filled tale of the joys of cooking ramen noodles. It contains some of the most hilarious lines ever written: "Holy Ramen Empire / Boiled in a day / Holy Ramen Empire / I eat too, Brute." Engelhardt's excitement builds as a spoken-word section gushes about the requisite thermal environment for adiabatic cold fusion of strong nuclear atoms using ramen noodles as fuel, and the listener is astonished by the Bobs' nerdiness as much as by their cleverness.

Richard Bob Greene and Joe Bob Finetti also contribute many brilliant songs. Greene's "She Made Me Name You Earl" is a bizarre ode to his phallus, his girlfriend, and the misunderstandings that occur between the sexes. It manages to be touching, absurd, offensive, and uproarious at the same time, no doubt due as much to its sweet waltz tune as to its wide-eyed lyrics: "I'm confused what she's talking about / When she calls that "thing" her stuff / And is her "area" where I think it is? / Is she just describing her muff? Finetti's most illustrious composition on this album is *Loyal Officer*, a rap song about a washed-up mall security guard with delusions of law-enforcement grandeur. "In my orange golf cart I feel like Miami Vice ... With no gun or cuffs my can of mace will have to do" Finetti raps, and the track is a portrait of the ultimate loser--challenged only by the protagonist of the Offspring's "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)".

Musically, the CD is incredibly diverse, containing songs that will please a cappella-heads of every variety. The listener is treated to funky/jazzy, smooth, heavily produced contemporary a cappella; a classic Baroque melody set as a duet argument between Johann Sebastian Bach and his wife Anna Magdalena; barbershop; gospel; something straight out of a B-movie; a fantastic, Finetti-penned rock song that is not a cappella at all and could be a major radio hit; and even a Doors classic arranged by Greene as a Renaissance madrigal.

The Bobs have been pleasing listeners for 20 years with their witty lyrics, sophisticated songwriting, and highly-esteemed vocal talent, and *Coaster* represents their art at its finest. It is highly recommended even for those who do not profess to be a cappella fans, as it is one of the few a cappella albums out there that can stand on its own solely by virtue of its songcraft. *The Bobs Coaster, Primarily A Cappella Records, 2000.*

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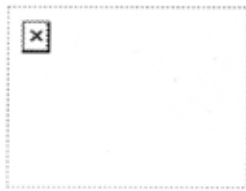
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