

Style



BY BRITEN LONZA/PRIMARILY A CAPPILLA

Just bob, bob, bobbin' along—the Bobs.

THE BOBS "Coaster"

Primarily A Cappella

It's been 20 years since the Bobs began subverting pop with off-beat a cappella vocal arrangements, and judging from the music on "Coaster," there's still no stopping them.

Although the San Francisco-based quartet's latest release is something of an anniversary celebration, the group's ingenuity trumps its endurance. Two decades of performing and recording certainly hasn't dulled its wits.

Longtime fans won't be surprised by the harmonies that converge here in peculiar and unexpected ways, beginning with the

cartoon-ish reprise of the Duke Ellington hit "Caravan."

From there, the group goes on to shamelessly cater to radio programmers ("The Drive Time Blues"), take comfort from convenient surrogate lovers ("Rubber Girl"), fashion a P.D.Q. Bach-like tribute to Johann Sebastian ("Bach to Bach"), introduce an over-achieving cat on a mission ("Fluffy's Master Plan for World Domination"), and add "Light My Fire" to its already sizable book of rock cover tunes.

There's also a hidden bonus track, though its title, "Hidden Bonus Track," and its mid-CD location make it a little easier to find than most. Amy Engelhardt's clever lyrics suggest she's heard more

than her share of these audio post-scripts, replete with "odes to inanimate objects, unfunny inside jokes, ad-libs and off-key warbling, stuff that doesn't rhyme."

Not everything clicks. Occasionally the Bobs mine a topic for all it's worth only to find that it's not worth much. "She Made Me Name You Earl," which concerns pet names for private parts, is a tedious case in point. Mostly, though, the CD's blend of fresh tunes, road-tested material and cunning harmonies holds up surprisingly well.

—Mike Joyce

Appearing Friday and Saturday at the Barns of Wolf Trap. ■ To hear a free Sound Bite from The Bobs, call Post-Haste at 202/334-9000 and press 8103. (Prince William residents, call 690-4110.)