Hawkward Takes the PPAC Stage on Saturday as 'Special Guest' Performers for Jay Leno

Lynda Curtis
Roger Williams University

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Hawkward Takes the PPAC Stage on Saturday as 'Special Guest' Performers for Jay Leno

As opening act for the comedian, a cappella group to perform nine songs, including 'Uptown Funk,' at the Providence Performing Arts Center

March 18, 2015 | Lynda Curtis

BRISTOL, R.I. – When Ali Isham ’13, Perry Cyr ’13 and Katie Marino ’13 formed the a cappella group Hawkward in 2010, the singers never imagined the group would perform for a crowd of 3,000 at the Providence Performing Arts Center.

Yet this weekend – on Saturday, March 21, at approximately 7:30 p.m. – Hawkward, now 20 members strong, will perform front and center for some of Rhode Island’s biggest champions for the arts at PPAC’s Annual Gala fundraiser as the opening act for late-night television show host and stand-up comedian Jay Leno.

An avid fan of a cappella, Leno ultimately selected Hawkward as the “special guest” performers after conducting a search for a local group that began last fall. Five other collegiate, regional and semi-professional groups were considered for the opening role, but Hawkward emerged as the first choice early in the process.

PPAC’s Vice President of Concerts Kelly Milukas played a primary role in the selection process. “Jay has a huge love for a cappella groups,” she says. “It was a direct request from him to find a local group to open the show. We researched a number of groups in the area and liked Hawkward the best. They were our first pick.”

For the performance, Hawkward is preparing nine songs – including “Uptown Funk” by Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars -- and the group plans to combine a mix of classic rock and traditional pop songs for its 25-minute set. Brad Shapiro, a graduate student studying architecture, has served as a tenor in Hawkward for four years and plays a critical role in the “musical family” as he arranges each song the group performs – a multiple-step process of replacing each instrument in the song with a singer’s voice. While the group has performed at a number of other venues including Blithewold Mansion, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island and a number of university invitational competitions in New England, the singers are adding more rehearsal time to prepare for the big performance on Saturday.
Erin Morrissette, a senior psychology major and Hawkward’s business manager, says that the PPAC performance will serve as a great send off for many of the seniors in the group.

“Performing as the opening act for Jay Leno is such an incredible opportunity,” she says. “I know that for myself and the other seniors, it’s a great way to end our singing career with Hawkward before we graduate this May.”