

concert • preview

Born to be a Bob

By ED CONDRAN
On the Go Correspondent

Amy Engelhardt was still trying to find her niche in the entertainment business when she met Joe "Bob" Finetti of the Bobs in 1996.

The two became acquainted while performing as part of a pickup jazz *a capella* group hired to sing Christmas carols on the set of "Seinfeld."

"We really connected," Engelhardt said, while calling from her Los Angeles home. "We cracked each other up. We would spend hours on the phone with each other. He's a great guy and he's a Bob."

The Bobs, an eccentric *a capella* group, has garnered a strong cult fan base courtesy of its witty original compositions and audacious covers of such classics as Cream's "White Room" and the Trashmen's "Surfin' Bird." The vocal virtuosos completely transform familiar songs, and are one of the most entertaining live acts on the circuit.



Concerted Efforts

Edison native Amy Engelhardt is just wild about The Bobs.

Engelhardt, a singer-songwriter, who graduated from Boston's prestigious Berklee School of Music, has been a fan since the mid-80s while attending Syracuse University. Just before she met Finetti, longtime Bob member Janie Scott left the group. However, timing wasn't on Engelhardt's side at that moment.

"They had just held auditions two weeks before I met Joe," Engelhardt recalled. "So I didn't know about them. I would have loved to have tried out for them."

However, The Bobs tabbed Lori Rivera. But the newest member of the act quit after a year. Finetti, 41, called his good friend Engelhardt, 34, to come in for an audition in 1997.

Engelhardt, an Edison native, who attended Rutgers Prep in Somerset, hit it off personally and professionally with Finetti's mates Matthew "Bob" Stull, 45, and the fiftysomething Richard "Bob" Greene.

"It was kismet," Engelhardt

said. "I was doing a lot of different things in L.A. like musical theater and improv at clubs. I tried to squeeze the humor out of my writing for pop songs and people didn't get it. The response I got was, 'well that song is really smart.' They didn't understand but the Bobs do. I really believe I was meant to be a Bob. After the audition I was called back, and we laughed and ate pizza. We hung out for four hours. When I left we hugged, and I thought if I don't get this gig I'm going to have hunt each of them down and hurt them."

There was no need for the L.A.P.D. to intervene. Engelhardt is now known as Amy "Bob" Engelhardt.

"It's the greatest experience," Engelhardt said. "It's like working with three wacky, older brothers."

Unlike the prior female Bobs, Engelhardt doesn't just contribute vocally. The sassy, quick-witted performer has penned a number of tunes, which grace

the group's latest album, "Coaster."

"For me writing is an integral part of what I do," Engelhardt said. "The rest of the guys understand this, and welcome my contributions."

Engelhardt is part of the group's 20th anniversary tour, which stops tomorrow at the Bottom Line in New York City.

"We're just going to celebrate by playing shows," Engelhardt said. "This is what the Bobs do best anyway."

The Bobs will showcase tracks from "Coaster," which hit the bins in December, at the Bottom Line. The material ranges from jazz to rock to gospel.

The show at the Bottom Line, which is dubbed "The Bobs' First 'Mostly' A Capella Comedy Show," also will feature such clever recording artists as fellow a capella act DaVinci's Notebook and folk singer-songwriter Vance Gilbert.

"It'll be a cavalcade of yucks," Engelhardt said. "It'll be goofy, wacky fun."