

SAM HURWITT

Rock at hard Place

I MUST CONFESS that I like a lot of silly music, just like any other geek who spent his early teens huddled listening to *The Dr. Demento Show* as if the radio were the only source of heat in the house. But really, it's hard not to love the **Bobs**.

The primarily a cappella quartet has been bopping around the Bay Area for twenty years now; the band celebrated its anniversary recently with a new disc called *Coaster* on, appropriately enough, Primarily A Cappella Records. It's not your older brother's Bobs, mind you, cofounder **Gunnar Madsen** left ten years ago, and was replaced by **Joe Finetti**, and **Janie Scott** begot **Lori Rivera**, who in turn begot **Amy Engelhardt**. But the killer combination of vocal chops and sly humor is still there in spades on this, their tenth album.

Coaster begins beautifully, with comic vocal horns tooting out **Duke Ellington's** "Caravan," for all intents and purposes a deo wop instrumental—never mind the lack of, you know, instruments. Some

of the material's inevitably boomer-specific. I can't begin to relate to "The Drive Time Blues": "Stuck in my car with NPR/ It can't get through my personal fog/ Did I feed the dog? Yes I fed the dog." And there's a cat song, which I'm against as a rule. (There are few more horrifying sentences in the world than "This is a poem I wrote about my cat.") But I can get behind "The Druid Song," an amusingly overblown plea for the trees: "Perhaps if man would just shut up, a tree could make a sound." Engelhardt sings, underminded by bass **Richard Greene** intoning, "We're talking tree."

Other delights include perverting the **Doors'** "Light My Fire" into a madrigal, an awfully cute stab at hip-hop from the perspective of a "Ironin' mall rent a-cop, and "Bach to Bach," an amusing duet between Greene and Engelhardt of Mrs. Bach trying to get some action out of her hard-working hubby Johann, who intones, "If I could only write/ a hit like Handel..." "She Made Me Name You Earl" offers a smooth, sorta barber-shop-style lament for a gentleman's Johnson, and there's some serious "Sweet Adeline" action on

Whisper to me honey you'll be shurwitt@eastbayexpress.com

"Barber Lips," an updated (or maybe downdated) version of the group's old "Cowboy Lips."

One unexpected oddity is "The Turtle Cycle," four songs inspired by monologist **Josh Kornbluth's** piece *Turtle Boy*, including some Manhattan Transfer-style vocal orchestrations, a bit of smarmy schlock-pop, and the affecting spiritual-style "That Old Swamp (It's

Getting Me Down)," penned and sung by Greene. The gospel number that ends the album, rousing despite how very white it is, gives a joyful shout up to the "A Cappella Choir in the Sky." And when you let the devil on the stage, a good show can go bad! Like *Cats* or *Rent* or *Stomp!* or heaven knows, *Forever Plaid!* But the Bobs still seem to be keeping that old devil at bay



The Bobs