



Photo provided
Boyz II Men, featuring (from left) Nathan Morris, Wanya Morris and Shawn Stockman, perform Thursday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center in Benton Harbor.

There's no 'End' in sight for BOYZ II MEN

Popular R&B group to perform Thursday at LMC's Mendel Center

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
HP Features Writer

BENTON HARBOR — Shawn Stockman had just performed a choir solo at the Girard Academic Music Program high school in Philadelphia, when he was approached by classmates Nathan Morris and Wanya Morris about singing in their group, originally known as Unique Attraction.

Within three years of adding fourth member Michael McCary and practicing their harmonies in a school bathroom, the group had convinced New Edition member Michael Bivins to produce their debut CD, "Cooleyhighharmony," and changed their name to Boyz II Men.

Recently celebrating their 20th anniversary, Boyz II Men still holds the No. 1, 3 and 4 spots for the longest running No. 1 singles in Billboard history. The group's first No. 1 single, 1992's "End of the Road," stayed atop the Billboard Hot 100 for 13 weeks, breaking a decades-old record held by Elvis Presley. The hits "I'll Make Love to You" and "One Sweet Day" set new records at 14 and 16 weeks.

Although McCary retired from performing due to his ongoing battle with scoliosis in 2003, Boyz II Men has continued on as a trio. The group currently has a residency at famed Las Vegas venue The Mirage and recently signed a new publishing and recording deal with BMG.

Before they head back into the studio, however, Stockman and his Boyz II Men brethren will make a tour stop Thursday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

First of all, Shawn, can you tell me what your show has been looking like lately and what we can expect to hear when Boyz II Men comes to town?

We're definitely looking forward to coming to Michigan and performing for the fans there. It's going to be a high-energy show built around the hits with some newer material mixed in as well.

I know you started singing together in some capacity in high school and that New Edition was an influence. What was it about that group and harmony in general that inspired you?

Harmony is so vital to who we are as a group, we started out singing

a capella in high school and our sound has always been very melodic. New Edition was one of the first really mainstream boy bands/ R&B groups so their sound definitely inspired us and they paved the way for us as a group.

There's a story out there that you snuck backstage at a New Edition concert to sing to Michael Bivins and that was the group's big break. That's a bold move. First of all, is it true, and can you share what happened that night?

That one is true! Michael was in Philly for a concert at the civic center. We were huge fans of his so we found our way backstage and asked him about how to get a record deal. He asked us to audition on the spot, so we sang for him right there. We must have made a good impression because a few weeks later he signed us to a production deal. Michael was instrumental in helping mold our early sound and the signature look that we became known for.

It was only a couple of years between rehearsing in high school bathrooms to releasing "Cooleyhighharmony." How crazy of a transition was that for you?

It was a huge, wild transition. When we were rehearsing in high school bathrooms, we never expected to reach that level of fame. We were just doing it because we loved it and

See BOYZ II MEN, page D7

IF YOU GO

- ▶ **WHAT:** Boyz II Men
- ▶ **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday
- ▶ **WHERE:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor
- ▶ **HOW MUCH:** \$49-\$60
- ▶ **CONTACT:** 927-1221 or www.lmcmainstage.org
- ▶ **ARTIST INFO:** www.boyziiimen.com

BOYZ II MEN

► From page D6

were passionate about making music. But we were – and still are – so grateful for the love and support from the fans every day. It's still crazy and awesome to us that we get to wake up every day and make music for a living and that we have such devoted fans.

Q When “End of the Road” hit in the 1990s, it was everywhere, then you followed it with “I’ll Make Love To You” and “One Sweet Day,” which did even better. Those songs obviously have endured. What do you think it is about them that still resonates with people?

A For us, it's always been about making timeless, quality music that our fans can pass down to their children. Those songs have endured, at least in part, because they are universal. They're about the real emotional moments and milestones that all of us experience. We have always believed that our fans deserve quality music that will withstand the test of time.

Q When Michael McCary retired from performing did you think it was the end of Boyz II Men? And ultimately what made the three of you decide to carry on as a trio?

A We knew we would evolve past it and con-

tinue on because we were so passionate about making music for the fans. We've all been performing together for so long that we have great chemistry as a group and we were able to make that shift to a trio fairly seamlessly without it impacting our sound or style.

Q Tell me about having a long-time Las Vegas gig. What's it been like to have the Boyz II Men show at The Mirage for the past year?

A It was actually just announced that our residency will be extended through 2014, and we could not be more thrilled about that. We love Vegas. The crowds have a special energy there, and to have a residency at one of the most renowned venues in the entertainment capitals of the world is amazing for us and we are grateful and excited to have a stage to call home there.

Q What else does the future hold for Boyz II Men?

A Besides our residency at The Mirage, we also recently signed a publishing and recording deal with BMG and will be releasing new music next year. And I'll be returning as a judge on NBC's hit show “The Sing Off” in December ... But right now we can't wait to see all of our Michigan fans at the show.

Email: jbonfiglio@TheHP.com

Twitter: @HPBonfiglio