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## Naturally 7 to bring its world-renowned 'vocal play' to Huntington

By DAVE LAVENDER

Nov 15, 2016



Courtesy of Naturally 7 Naturally 7 brings its unique a capella musical stylings to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center in Huntington at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17, as part of the Marshall Artists Series.

When Warren Thomas opens his mouth, who knows what will come out.

But pretty much everyone the world over calls it what it appears to be - pure musical magic.

Whether it is voicing a full drumset, the soaring notes of an electric guitar or singing an angelic tenor, Thomas and his brother Roger (rapper, arranger and first baritone) have teamed up to create something they call vocal play - a cappella music on steroids - that is loved the world over in their genre-bending, mind-blowing vocal group Naturally 7.



The group, which has chalked up three world tours with music superstar Michael Buble and which performed earlier this year at the Lincoln Memorial for MLK Day, at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival and with Diana Ross at her two concerts at the Hollywood Bowl, are coming to Huntington.

Naturally 7 will bring their mound of sound in which they sing and mimic the sounds of all the instruments to the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17, as the Marshall Artists Series continues to celebrate its 80th season. Tickets are \$68.20, \$52.15, \$36.10 and \$26.47 at the Marshall Artists Series Box Office at 304-696-6656, online at Ticketmaster.com or at the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse box office from noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Warren Thomas, one of the five original members who have been singing together since 1999, said while the road can be tough, it is that look of wonder in people's eyes and that spirit of love and unity they feel with a crowd that makes it all worthwhile.

"That is the best feeling, and the payoff for all of the traveling and being away from your family (is) when you get on stage and you look at the expressions and you see a big appreciation and the amazement of a crowd that was brought together by music," Warren Thomas said. "We definitely know music brings people together."

For brothers Warren and Roger Thomas, they learned that lesson soon after they were born as their father had a gospel group in the Bronx that practiced in their home.

"My father's group always rehearsed in our home, so it was a big inspiration - that sense of family in a group and the group members became like your uncles to some degree," Warren Thomas said. "We knew we wanted to be in a group, and we used to sing in church with different guys. On the



other side of that we were growing up in the Bronx and there was all this hip hop out on the streets. It was happening, and we definitely wanted to be a part of that as well."

Growing up in that melting pot of creativity, the Thomases brought in all of those sounds and feelings to their music.

While Warren Thomas wanted badly to play drums, his parents nixed the idea because of space issues at the house. And, while he wanted an electric guitar, they let him have a small acoustic guitar, and thus beginning the birth of Warren Thomas mimicking all the sounds and rhythms of the drums and electric guitar.

Mesmerized by drummers, he said he immediately went beyond beat boxing and tried to mimic all of the sounds of the drums and the electric guitar while keeping rhythm on his acoustic guitar to Roger's rapping.

"I was always really drawn to drummers, and I started watching what they do and mimicking their stance and their movements and their sounds, and that is that came about," Warren Thomas said. "From there it was thinking, 'Instead of having a bass singing the words we have a bass and have it grooving to the drums,' and that's when we created this whole style, Vocal Play, and what we found were people who were already doing this in their own life. We didn't say, 'Let's figure out how to do a harmonica, or a DJ scratching sound,' we found guys who just happened to do this thing that they had always been doing."

Because of their unusual style and their ability to blend up everything from gospel standards to popular songs such as Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," to originals of all musical flavors, Naturally Seven has found itself performing with a wide range of artists who are



fans. They have dueted with Ludacris on Quincy Jones' most recent studio album, performed at the BET Honours for Herbie Hancock, performed with Coldplay, performed for Prince Charles and performed at the prestigious TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conference where the group received a standing ovation.

And, in what has been the biggest boost to their career, Naturally 7 has chalked up three duets and three world tours with their now good friend Michael Buble.

Their first tour with Buble was in 2007, on the heels of their fourth release "Ready II Fly," which had the YouTube-hit "Feel It (In the Air Tonight)." The song turned into a Top 3-chart-success in France, Belgium and South Africa and made the single charts in other European countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Portugal.

Warren Thomas said touring with Buble became a game changer as Buble took the group all over the world and introduced them to his legions of fans.

"We counted up that just touring with Michael for three world tours we had played to like six million people," Thomas said. "... That is how Michael is, he said 'I want people to see the best,' and after a while we weren't just opening but we were a part of the show, and we did songs with him and he became a great champion of our music."

Warren Thomas said that as the group aged and began to take on really heavy touring dates, they realized they had to be really disciplined with their "instruments" on the road.



"We are the background singers, we are the instruments, we are the dancers, we are everything, it is just us so we really try to protect our voices," Warren Thomas said. "We don't have anything else. We can't go down to Guitar Center and get another one. It took a while to figure that out in the early days we're traveling in those 15-passenger vans, and we're all talking and it would get louder and louder and then we would hardly have any voice left at the show. We got to a point where we were like, 'We have got to do better,' and we do ... the best thing to repair the voice is rest, so we get a lot of rest and none of us smoke or drink so that has preserved us."

While the Thomas brothers may have toured together from China to New Zealand, they have also not strayed far from the Biblical lessons taught by their mother and father in their Bronx home.

"Being in a group is not easy, and everyone has to move in the right direction, and God is the best way for me to say it as to how we have stayed together for so long," Warren said. "We are all Christian brothers of like minds, and we have a goal and that is the key. If we are all working for the same goal we have to work in tandem together."

Sharing songs off their latest album, "Hidden in Plain Sight," Naturally 7 feels blessed to be sharing their uniting songs of love nightly and bringing together diverse people through the music.

"We have performed in some of the strangest places, and when we are on tour if someone takes us to a radio station it can be anything from talk and classical, to jazz, R&B and Top 40 it doesn't make any difference," Thomas said. "Our music defies age and race and creed and color. It is something when you see a full family from children to grandparents and they all say this is the best concert we have seen, and it is very rare for parents and teens to both say wow, but this is something we have been able to do, and we feel blessed to have had that kind of impact."

If you go

WHAT: A cappella group, Naturally 7

WHERE: Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17

WHO IS NATURALLY 7: Formed in 1999 in New York City, Naturally 7 is the Thomas brothers - Roger (musical director, arranger, first baritone, rapping) and Warren (drums, guitar, third tenor) - plus Rod Eldridge (first tenor, scratching, trumpet); Rickey Cort (fourth tenor, guitar), Dwight Stewart

(second baritone, vocals, trombone), Garfield Buckley (second tenor, harmonica), and Kelvin "Kelz" Mitchel (bass guitar, trumpet)

**TICKETS:** Tickets for Naturally 7 are \$68.20, \$52.15, \$36.10, and \$26.47. Contact the Marshall Artists Series Box Office at 304-696-6656, order tickets online at Ticketmaster.com or visit the box office located in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse on the Marshall University campus. Box office hours are noon to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

**SPONSORS:** Naturally 7 is sponsored by The Hoops Family Children's Hospital, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, WV Department of Education, WV Department of Education and the Arts - Kay Goodwin, Cabinet Secretary, African-American Students Programs at Marshall University, Marsha Slater - State Farm Insurance, Dr. Stephen Nicholas, Marshall Orthopaedics, The Glick Foundation, KEE 100, WVHU, WSAZ, The Herald-Dispatch and Marshall University

**ON DECK AT THE MAS:** Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra present Big Band Holidays: 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 8, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center.

## Welcome to the discussion.

**Keep it Clean.** Please avoid obscene, vulgar, lewd, racist or sexually-oriented language.

**PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR CAPS LOCK.**

**Don't Threaten.** Threats of harming another person will not be tolerated.

**Be Truthful.** Don't knowingly lie about anyone or anything.

**Be Nice.** No racism, sexism or any sort of -ism that is degrading to another person.

**Be Proactive.** Use the 'Report' link on each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

**Share with Us.** We'd love to hear eyewitness accounts, the history behind an article.

