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Duquesne's 'Mic Drop' A Capella Vocal Ensemble Off to an Impressive Start

Blake Mechtel (B.S. Music Education, class of 2020) founded the University's only official student-run a capella vocal ensemble, Mic Drop, in fall 2016. The group has already enjoyed surprising success both in and outside of Pittsburgh.

Most recently, Mic Drop performed for a Duquesne donors' brunch, at many sporting events, and during the Pittsburgh City tree lighting ceremony. At the New Kids on the Block festival at the University of Pittsburgh, Blake and his group sang along side three UPitt ensembles at the Oakland campus, moving Duquesne further into the regional spotlight. Mic Drop's 2018 Christmas concert in the PNC Hall was a great success, packing the space with many students, parents, and other curious listeners.

What does "Mic Drop" mean? As a dramatic signal of triumph after a successful performance, a singer sometimes drops the microphone on the ground. Students in Duquesne's Music Tech program will tell you that this action does not necessarily damage the microphone, provided it is of a certain type (A Shure SM58 works well, while a Neumann U87 would definitely not be a good choice). Former President Barack Obama dropped his microphone on Jimmy Fallon's Late Night Show in 2016, and again at his last White House Correspondents' Dinner, popularizing the act.

Mic Drop singers have also travelled to Rochester, NY where they made an outstanding debut at the prestigious International Championship of Collegiate A Capella (ICCA)

competition. This nationwide event attracts hundreds of college groups every year. Not only was one of their songs a surprise nominee for best arrangement, but also two of their singers (Gabrielle Garcia and Mechtel) were nominated for best soloist. In February 2019, Mic Drop returned to the ICCA to compete with some of the best a capella groups from the United States.

Not content merely to perform while holding (or dropping) microphones, Mechtel and his group have reached out to the community as well, leading educational workshops at Flint Hill Preparatory School and Thomas Jefferson High School.

Representing a diverse swath of students across the campus, Mic Drop boasts strong membership from the Mary Pappert School of Music as well as the Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Education, and others. With such strength in diversity, Mic Drop has already proven to be a highly effective tool for outreach, benefitting the entire University.

Mic Drop's crowdfunding campaign raised over \$1000 this year to help offset expenses related to travelling and educating. Mechtel and the Mic Drop singers hope to continue arranging, inventing, entertaining, and educating both within Duquesne's tightly-woven community, and the larger Allegheny region. With so much success in so little time, they seem to be off to a roaring start. ■