

## Backtrack Vocals Review

by Amanda Morazain



The evening of Dec. 12th, a full house was given an early Christmas gift as Backtrack Vocals took to the Kelowna Community Stage as the second in a series put on by the Kelowna Community Concert Association.

The five vocalists, reigning from NYC, are an a cappella group that give new life to well-known songs by creating modern arrangements filled with tight harmonies, rhythmic lines, and beatboxing. Backtrack Vocals are Mallory Moser (soprano), Melissa Jordano (alto), Mike Hinkle (tenor), Jojo Otseidu (bass), and Johnny Buffalo (beatbox).

The show kicked off with the catchy carol *Winter Wonderland* (Bernard & Smith) where the group energetically harmonized seamlessly together while moving together in synchronized choreography.

Backtrack Vocals put on a non-stop, entertaining show. From having the audience take part in vocal warm ups, to having them join along with hand gestures to *Ain't No Mountain High Enough* (Ashford & Simpson) the group constantly engaged the crowd by having them participate throughout the evening. One of the highlights of the audience participation occurred when tenor Hinkle invited everyone to play a game of Mad Libs which involved asking for things like verbs, adjectives, and nouns. The group then took the new words and inserted them into the song *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town* (Coots & Gillespie), creating a humorous and highly enjoyable new take on the Christmas classic.

Alto Jordano not only wowed the audience with her vocal abilities, but also showcased her compositional skills when Backtrack Vocals performed her original song *Driftwood*.

Bass Otseidu's tone was pure velvet. His smooth tone and rhythmic bass lines gave the group support, allowing them to navigate the technically challenging harmonies. Unfortunately, the bass was booming at times and disrupted the balance of the group because the level was too high. This issue was quickly rectified during the intermission. Otseidu displayed his vocal versatility as he opened the song *Over the Rainbow* (Arlen & Harburg) by singing a beautiful, sweet tenor line.

Beatboxer Buffalo had his chance to shine during a solo where he truly amazed the crowd by distorting his voice to sound like percussive instruments. It felt like you were in a loud dance club listening to layers of instruments although it was all coming from one voice.

Backtrack Vocals veered away from the Christmas Carols and delighted the audience with powerful arrangements of *This Is Me* (Pasek & Paul) from *The Greatest Showman* and a medley of Beethoven compositions.

I have been to many shows during my lifetime and there are a handful of performances that felt like they passed by too quickly because I was having so much fun. This happened at Backtrack Vocals. Thank you to the Kelowna Community Concert Association for bringing this incredibly entertaining a cappella group to Kelowna and for showing us the magic of what the human voice is capable of doing.

Make sure to catch the next performance in the series happening on February 9th, "Oceans of Hope", which features a dozen of Ireland's finest dancers and musicians.

*Submitted by Amanda Morazain – jazz singer, vocal coach*