

The University of Akron

IdeaExchange@UAkron

Williams Honors College, Honors Research
Projects

The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors
College

Winter 2020

Brothers, Sing On: The Story of Nuance

Kyle Reynolds
ktr16@ziips.uakron.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [Film Production Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), and the [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Kyle, "Brothers, Sing On: The Story of Nuance" (2020). *Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects*. 1230.

https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/1230

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Brothers, Sing On: The Story of Nuance

Kyle Reynolds

School of Communication

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

Approved:

_____ Date _____
Honors Project Sponsor (signed)
Mr. Juan Contreras

_____ Date _____
Reader (signed)
Dr. Kathleen Clark

_____ Date _____
Reader (signed)
Dr. Marie Bucoy-Calavan

Accepted:

_____ Date _____
School Director (signed)
Dr. Heather Walter

_____ Date _____
Honors Faculty Advisor (signed)
Dr. Kathleen Clark

_____ Date _____
Dean, Honors College

Abstract

For this project, I have elected to create a documentary detailing the chronological history of the University of Akron's all-male contemporary pop a Cappella group, Nuance. The Documentary is titled: "Brothers, Sing On: the Story of Nuance" as a reference to the song "Brothers, Sing On!" by Edvard Grieg, and was named such because of the theme of brotherhood I have showcased in the documentary. I have been a member of Nuance since the Spring Semester of 2018 and have served as the president of the group since Spring Semester 2019. Nuance was founded in 2004, making it one of the longest-standing student organizations at the University. Nuance's alumni base continues to be supportive and attentive to the group's current events, often coming to visit at evening rehearsals, local performances, and the end of semester concerts. However, much of the group's history has not been recorded in any tangible form, and is left up to word-of-mouth, guessing, or rumors. With this documentary, I interviewed some of the group's most influential and long-standing members to provide their accounts on the group's most pivotal moments.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Academic Impact	5
Methodology	6
Literature Review	9
Goals.....	14
Reflection	15
Further Recommendations	17
Credits.....	18
References	20
Appendix: Link to Video	21

Introduction

My main motivation for this documentary is my passion for Nuance. The group has been essential to my college experience, and I would like to share some of those experiences and feelings with my peers. I have spoken to multiple Nuance alumni over the years about their experiences, and it drives my curiosity to bridge the different generations of the group together. Nuance has gone through several different phases since its inception, starting out as a small side-group created by six music graduate students. Over fifteen years later, Nuance continues to perform around the greater Cleveland area in Northeastern Ohio at a variety of venues, events, and functions. Each “era” of the group has a meaningful role in the group’s history and reputation, and my documentary cohesively bridges the gaps between them through various testimonies and recordings.

The reason I have opted to create a documentary is my experience in and love for video production. I came to the University of Akron for its award-winning, student-led television station ZTV. My Communication major’s concentration is in Media Studies, and I have spent much of my time in high school and college creating videos to share with others. I have been a member of ZTV for longer than I have been a member of Nuance, and I have thought of ways in the past to bring both of my passions together. I have worked with ZTV previously to partner with Nuance, resulting in a special package for their music and arts show *Lowdown* to showcase Nuance’s Spring 2019 concert. As I prepare prepared for my upcoming graduation in the Fall Semester of 2020, I have been searching for and obtaining my own recording equipment with the help and guidance from fellow ZTV members and the School of Communication faculty. I have been fortunate to have been able to use the University’s resources to create video content during

my time here. With the skills and experience acquired through ZTV and my major's coursework, this documentary combines my passion for media with one of the most influential parts of my college experience.

The final Documentary is 21 minutes in length and will be available for viewing on Nuance's official YouTube channel, as well as the University's YouTube channel as an Honors Project showcase. I have also talked to Mr. Juan Contreras, ZTV's General Manager and the sponsor for my project about the possibility of showing it on ZTV's campus cable station, 45-1. During the approval process, the video will be uploaded to my personal YouTube channel through the link provided at the end of this paper. It will be presented in a way that is easily accessible to public audiences and will be shared with the people involved including past and present group members, University officials, the University's other a Cappella groups, and any other groups who may request to view the documentary. The finished product aims to deliver a visual history of the group that will bridge the gaps between generations and resonate with the members and close friends of Nuance.

Academic Impact

This documentary provides a tangible product that showcases the skills and abilities I have learned through my undergraduate experience in the School of Communication at the University of Akron. I can use the documentary in my professional portfolio when applying to jobs in media and visual communication fields. My peers and mentors from school programs such as ZTV and similar courses will be able to see this product as indicative of my growth as a video producer. The high standards of the Honors Project have allowed me to challenge myself to create a documentary that not only showcases my knowledge and skills, but also putting a

spotlight on a student organization that was integral to my success in my undergraduate studies, Nuance. The personal impact of being a member of Nuance has translated and combined with the passion for creating and producing content that compelled me to study at the University of Akron.

Methodology

The narrative of the documentary is centered primarily around interviews and testimonies of various Nuance alumni. Founding members, past presidents, directors and/or any members that were otherwise influential to the group during their time will be targeted specifically. Even though the group's history has not been efficiently archived for most of its lifespan, many members have kept documents, videos and other records that were useful in creating the documentary. In recent years, Nuance has also kept a shared Google Drive that contains a lot of insight and information on specific semesters that could be useful for the contents of the documentary.

In addition to documents and text records, the group has access and ownership to many performances from concerts and rehearsals that can be used in association with a University-sponsored project such as this. The images and videos will be used to best convey visually what the interviewee (the alumnus) is referring to, or from their "era" of the group's history. I met with them individually with a set list of open-ended questions intended to lead to long spans of dialogue from the interviewee.

While preparing for these interviews to take place during the Spring 2020 semester, University of Akron members would be sent home due to the increasing spread of Covid-19, which would be labeled a global pandemic by the World Health Organization later in the month.

Soon after students, staff and other University members were dismissed, most businesses and facilities were shut down in Ohio, with limited exceptions to essential services necessary for supplies. In addition to closures, people were strongly advised to stay at home, and to only gather with the people in their immediate household. Because of this, most interviews had to be scheduled over a Zoom video call and recorded within the software. Out of respect to the interviewees, I elected to conduct interviews based on their comfort level. Most interviews done were virtual, with the final two being done on campus following the social-distancing and cautionary guidelines in place. One interview was recorded in Leigh Hall Auditorium, Nuance's usual rehearsal space using a personal camera and sound equipment borrowed from ZTV, and the final interview was done in ZTV's television studio in Kolbe Hall. Both in-person interviews would not have been possible without the resources available to me at ZTV and the help of Mr. Contreras.

The interviewees were set up in chronological order of their time in the group for most of the documentary, unless his insight or thoughts were relevant to something else in the documentary that occurred at a different time. For the production process of the documentary, I had everyone interviewed before I began assembling their condensed clips on a timeline to edit and bring thoughts together. Before assembling the documentary itself, I first condensed each interview individually, and planned out where I would put clips, in what order, and what visuals needed to be seen during their portion. My tentative timeline for the project is:

- By March 1- send in Proposal revised by sponsor, readers, and Honors advisor to Honors College website

- By March 2 (or upon final approval)- schedule time to meet with sponsor with a tentative storyboard of the project to discuss filming/interviewing logistics and locations, sources, etc.
- By March 6- submit completed CITI certification for Honors Project Preparatory Course on Brightspace
- By March 20- Schedule meeting with Dr. Clark to discuss Literature Review
- By April 1- contact alumni requested for interview and schedule a time for the interview to take place
- By April 15- submit first draft of Literature Review on Brightspace
- By May 6- submit final draft of Literature review on Brightspace
- By June 1- have interviews compiled and organized for use in editing, finding any sources for B-roll or miscellaneous video/images to use in project, finding out if any extra footage/interviews/is needed to complete the project
- By July 1- begin assembling the timeline for the documentary in Adobe Premiere Pro, compiling interviews and clips together as close to the storyboarded timeline as possible. Finding any unforeseen “gaps” in the project and planning to find/create ways to fill them
- By September 30- submit first draft of Nuance Documentary to Sponsor for review and revision
- By October 14- submit revised draft of Nuance Documentary to Sponsor for review
- By October 28- submit draft of Nuance Documentary to Readers to review and revision
- By November 16- submit draft of Nuance Documentary to Honors Advisor for review
- By December 4- submit completed Nuance Documentary to the Honors College and Brightspace with completed signatures

Literature Review

Before beginning work on the documentary, I contacted my project sponsor, Mr. Juan Contreras, as well as my two project readers, Dr. Kathleen Clark and Dr. Bucoy-Calavan, for literature to review for both documentary filmmaking and contemporary pop a capella music, or any other research that they felt would have been relevant to my project. I also searched for several additional resources for a review, using their recommendations as the groundwork or leads.

In higher education institutions all over the world, student-led pop *a cappella* groups are a known presence on campus. Collegiate pop *a cappella* groups are commonly extracurricular and student-led, which leads to a wide array of personalities, majors, and skill levels between groups and the members within each one (Jones, 2016). In research as part of a study conducted by Sarah K. Jones (2016), students had specific reasoning behind choosing between a campus choir and a co-ed pop *a cappella* group. Compared to a traditional choir, pop *a cappella* groups are much smaller in size, have more social aspects during meetings, and contain only students belonging to the institution of the group. These smaller, more intimate groups appear more attractive to some incoming college freshmen who are looking to be involved with music on campus, while also searching for a community of their peers (Jones, 2016). The desire to create music combined with the desire to meet and connect with others is the driving message for my documentary on Nuance, an all-male pop *a cappella* group at the University of Akron that I have been a member of since 2018. This documentary will highlight the moments in the group's history and shed light onto the framework of the music itself, in accordance with Joshua S.

Duchan's (2007) theory of pop *a cappella* groups balancing themselves between emulation and originality. In addition to footage of performances and rehearsals, testimonials from former and current group members will be recorded to recount the individual ideas and innovations that cultivate the culture that Nuance has today, and what distinguishes Nuance from similar pop *a cappella* groups.

Pop *a cappella* music has been around in many forms before this college craze appeared, even in pop culture iterations such as barbershop quartets or more recently glee clubs (Duchan, 2012). In his 2007 article, Duchan contends that college pop *a cappella* groups differ from other close-harmony ensembles by the choices they make as an ensemble (p. 477). Most prominently, pop *a cappella* groups use already existing material, popular music from the late 20th century into music on top 40 music stations today. Although the songs performed are written by other artists, pop *a cappella* groups create their own style with deliberate vocal choices when replicating the accompaniment and the solo of the original song. In addition to experience within Nuance, discussion with other pop *a cappella* groups has provided insight on how groups pick what songs to perform and how they will be arranged. Working with several student directors in Nuance, they elaborate that the arrangement process is not only about imitating the source material, but about accentuating the group's unique, collective voice as well.

Jones' study on the members of two different vocal ensembles, one a traditional "Campus Choir" and the other a co-ed pop *a cappella* group, highlighted the reasonings why certain singers might choose different ensembles (2016). One theory that is presented by J. D. Frizzell in a discussion with popular pop *a cappella* pioneer Deke Sharon, is that pop *a cappella* is an easy way to make people enthusiastic about singing (2015). Jones' study noted that many of the subjects who chose to join the pop *a cappella* group were not music majors, while many of the

choir members were (2016, p. 256). Many members of Nuance were not music majors during their time in the group, with some even having minimal musical experience before joining. Currently, the group has no music majors at all. By referencing the findings in Jones' study, the testimonials from a variety of Nuance's alumni will include reasonings and attractions from both music and non-music majors (2016).

Like many other collegiate pop *a cappella* groups, Nuance desired to expand their presence in the form of studio recorded songs and albums (Duchan, 2012). In 2014, they released an Extended Play (EP) titled *The Premier(e)* and have since then recorded and released two albums, another EP, and several singles in between. Every asset of the first two albums, from their mixing and mastering to the album cover art, was done by members within the group or close friends of said group members. The editor, the group's musical director at the time of the first EP's release, would mix together the recordings and send proofs and samples for the rest of the group to listen to in the meantime. Some debate exists on the legitimacy of recording pop *a cappella* music, as well as the use of editing and mixing to fix issues like pitches and rhythms (Duchan, 2012). Overseeing the production of Nuance's most recent EP as president of the group, I have seen and participated in these debates as well. From the outcomes of these debates and discussions, the decisions in sound mixing are largely a subjective matter, and change with members' personal tastes.

When an album is finished and released, many members of the group are excited for the result. Duchan asserts that recording in a studio is a social bonding experience for the group, as well as creating a physical product that they can be proud of (2012, p. 489). For Nuance, recording and releasing professional-quality music was a significant milestone in the group's history. When creating a documentary, Paula Rabinowitz (1993) explains the purpose of this

style of filmmaking as using the privileges of the present to examine the events of the past. Nuance was founded in 2004, celebrating its sixteenth anniversary this year. In his 2007 examination, Duchan attributed the work of Deke Sharon and Adam Farb both starting the *Best of College Pop a cappella* compilations in 1995 and founding the *International Championship of Collegiate A Capella* a year later as the beginning of collegiate pop pop *a cappella*'s current popularity. Having been around for sixteen of the twenty-five years of college pop pop *a cappella*'s modern history according to Duchan, Nuance found itself active for more than half this timeframe.

To document the history of Nuance as a group, more than just a stern recollection of past events and persons is needed. Rabinowitz asserts that a documentary is not merely a form of filmmaking that recounts the past, but one that utilizes the historical past to interpret these events to provide insight and clarity for viewers depending on their impression of the film (1993). Rabinowitz' theory on the purpose of documentary filmmaking will manifest itself as a tool to bridge the gaps in time and experience between members of Nuance from its inception to now. Jill Godmilow and Ann-Louise Shapiro (1997) offer their own insight into the purposes and motivations of documentary filmmaking; most prominently that the history and reality still need to speak emotionally to its audience. One of the main challenges of this project will be to create this emotional significance with the resources available for the documentary, which will be comprised primarily archived video footage and on-camera interviews with past and present members of Nuance. The combination of theories from both Rabinowitz and the team of Godmilow and Shapiro will be used to create a compelling history with an emotional impact on audience members beyond those with prior knowledge of Nuance or pop *a cappella* groups in general.

The bulk of newly-produced content needed for this documentary are video interviews to develop the narratives and themes between interviewees in relation to their membership in Nuance. Godmilow and Shapiro state that one of the biggest challenges of historical documentary filmmaking is creating a work of “non-fiction” using interviews and post-event explanation to supplement the source material; this will be an obstacle in observing Nuance as minimal video evidence exists for the group during key decisions and milestones such as the decision to record and release their first EP (1997). This lack of source material and reliance on word-of-mouth memory sharing is one of my driving motivations for creating this documentary. With these challenges in mind, the documentary on Nuance’s history will contain all significant resources available to create a compelling and informative message. Rabinowitz asserts that a historical documentary is not only meant to recollect and archive the past, but to use these events from the past to carve a path for the future (1993). This documentary is not meant to be merely a recounting of the group’s chronological history, but an accolade of the present and an inspiration for the future as well.

Through examining the studies conducted on pop *a cappella* music, and specifically college pop *a cappella* groups such as Nuance, each group has the potential to create unique experiences for those who choose to join. Whether these students choose to join for primarily musical or social reasons, an pop *a cappella* group presents opportunities that they may not find anywhere else. Recording an album or an EP is an endeavor that requires substantial decision-making, technical knowledge and experience, and a desire for accomplishment and pride for the group and its individuals. The recording of *The Premier(e)* is one area of Nuance’s history that broke the mold of the past and set a course for the future.

The documentary-focused authors and their insights on the multi-faceted process on documentary filmmaking is the key to capturing Nuance's past, present, and future. The names and faces of the members who led the group through these milestones will be seen, sharing their stories in a documentary interview format that has never been done before in Nuance's history. The knowledge and theories of the authors of both pop *a cappella* music studies and documentary filmmaking lay the groundwork in making a product that will capture the important aspects of Nuance and its members, from its inception to today.

Goals

When the plan for this documentary was initially created, my main goals were to create a project that showcased my video production expertise culminated through several semesters studying media at the University of Akron, and also to provide a visual retelling of Nuance's history to be able to share with past and present Nuance members. While these goals persisted through the creation and subsequent completion of the project, extenuating circumstances caused my perspective on these goals to shift, as well as reevaluate the purpose and meaning of this project to its core audience, the members and alumni of Nuance.

When the pandemic sent everyone home and canceled most in-person plans for the foreseeable future, performing groups, and especially singing groups, were hit particularly hard. Information and research coming out showed that Covid-19 was easily spread through respiratory droplets travelling through the air. Singing, of course, produces even more droplets than talking. Because of this, singing performances were canceled, with groups still not being able to rehearse or perform together currently. Nuance was in the height of preparing for the

group's Spring 2020 concert when we received word that gatherings and events were to be canceled immediately. Caught off-guard and holding out hope, Nuance ended their semester early with no new music to show for it.

While brainstorming ideas to continue releasing music remotely, the group planned several releases for the next year, using individual recordings and sending them to our resident recording producers and Nuance alumni Zach Toom and Mickey McGroarty. Still, group leadership sought out ways for us to continue meeting and singing remotely and remained hopeful that we would be able to sing in the same space once again. In addition to a chronological storytelling of Nuance's foundlings, I believe my documentary will serve as a positive reminder of the group's trials and tribulations, and will encourage optimism as the group, and many other singing groups like Nuance, await positive news that would allow them to return.

Reflection

Creating a documentary using unscripted testimonials presents many opportunities and challenges. Creating a documentary of this kind during a pandemic presents even more opportunities and challenges, with some compacting onto the existing ones, and other completely new. The circumstances surrounding the work on this project also generated new obstacles and roadblocks in ways I had not anticipated until they ultimately arose. When the pandemic was developing in March, I was in the Honors Project Preparatory Course, and my proposal had already been drafted. Of course, I had to make some adjustments to my strategy and methodology to accommodate these new limitations. The biggest issue presented with the

pandemic was having to ultimately record most interviews remotely over the summer, out of respect and caution to those I planned to interview. Fortunately, everyone involved was incredibly understanding and flexible, and allowed me what I needed to create the final product.

When first grappling with the fact that my project would not look how I may originally have envisioned it, with high definition interviews with professional equipment and camerawork, I had several meetings with Juan Contreras, my sponsor and longtime professor and mentor for his advice. He empathized with my initial disappointment in the lack of video and audio quality for many interviews. Zoom, while incredibly convenient and easy to use for calls and screen recording, would inevitably suffer from latency and connection issues common in any virtual conference call. For example, my interview with Jesse Lange, the group's founder, had several moments with the screen freezing or the audio temporarily going out of sync with the video due to connection issues. However, through these shortcomings, Juan gave me some insight that I used to guide my project going forward: What is most important in a documentary like this is the story. As long as there are means to tell the story and to create the greater narrative, the project will be successful. I regularly reassured myself with this advice and adopted a story-over-setting mentality to continue work on the project even things looked lackluster to my eye.

Although the two interviews conducted with professional recording equipment made me imagine a documentary where every shot looked clear and bright, there were some unforeseen opportunities with the interview format most them underwent. Firstly, the interviewees seemed very comfortable during the discussion. Some people naturally get nervous in front of a camera or with special recording equipment attached or pointing at them, but a Zoom call allowed for participants to feel at ease in a casual, familiar setting inside their own home. I feel this casual atmosphere contributed to some great discussion between myself and the interviewee. Jesse

Lange, for example, talked with me for over 3 hours about the group, his stories and memories, as well as opening up the discussion back to me and creating a nice conversation between two strangers who share a connection. There undoubtedly would have been a different environment if it were me meeting someone for the first time while pointing a camera in their face and saying “action.” I would often set aside 2 hours of more for these interviews, because they more often than not snowballed into a lighthearted recounting of stories and memories between two different eras of Nuance.

The story-over-setting mentality also reassured me when finding video clips to use in-between pauses and over top of conversations within the documentary. Much of Nuance’s archive is from YouTube, Facebook, or Google Drive, and as such the video quality of these clips are not on the level of what is commonly seen today with 1080p HD, 4K, etc. However, many clips, especially those of more candid and lighthearted moments not caught on stage in front of a traditional audience, greatly impacted the tone of the documentary and the group itself. Those moments of playing limbo during rehearsal or filming little sketches to promote concerts or other releases are a large part of what makes Nuance so special to me and many of its members outside of just an extracurricular singing group.

Further Recommendations

When working with individuals, especially in a non-scripted format, planning far ahead is essential. Contacting subject early with a detailed and organized game plan, as well as having an alternative plan if things do not work quite the way they were initially envisioned is crucial to the success of such a project. Once I was able to meet with participants in person following guidelines after research had developed on Covid-19’s spread, planning and preparedness was

once again integral to a successful interview. These interviewees also completely volunteered their time with no expectation of compensation, so it was important to respect their time as much as possible.

When editing in Adobe Premiere Pro, I found it most useful to edit each interviewee's clips individually, and then link together the key points and stories they made before ultimately placing them on a timeline. While compiling these individual clips, I found that some stories overlapped more than others, so I adjusted the placement accordingly. I originally sought to storyboard this project, but I found that trial and error worked well for me in this scenario because so many of the interviews were fluid and flexible. Although I gave participants questions to answer, they were very open ended and often as simple as "tell me the story of how you joined the group and got to where you ended up." This allowed for both the interviewees to be more comfortable sharing their story without pressure, as well as myself to be able to find large chunks of information within the clip at a time while editing.

Credits

A project of this magnitude could not have been completed start to finish alone, and so I have many individuals, organizations, and others to thank. These parties are also credited at the end of the documentary.

- Juan Contreras, my project sponsor who guided my preparation and storytelling, as well as being willing to provide any information or assistance that he could.

- Dr. Kathleen Clark, one of my two project readers and my School of Communication Honors advisor who stayed in communication with me on the progress of my project, as well as giving me the tools to begin work through the Preparatory Course.
- Dr. Marie Bucoy-Calavan, my second project reader and Nuance's faculty advisor for residing over the group's endeavors for several years, and providing assistance for my project where needed.
- Jesse Lange, Matthew Dolan, Zach Toom, Brandon Crites, Alex Lintner, Justin Brown, and Mickey McGroarty for allowing me to interview them for this project as outstanding Nuance alumni and sharing their story for the sake of the documentary
- Past and present members of Nuance for providing inspiration and motivation to me during the work and completion of the project
- Payton Burkhammer, a good friend and colleague in the School of Communications who graciously designed and created the lower third titles used in the documentary.
- The University of Akron and the Williams Honors College for providing me with the opportunity to create a documentary as both an academic capstone and a labor of love to Nuance.
- EJ Thomas Performing Arts Hall, The Akron Civic Theater, and Leigh Hall Auditorium for working with Nuance over so many years to provide performing venues for the group.

References

- Duchan, J. S. (2007). Collegiate pop *a cappella*: Emulation and Originality. *American Music*, 25(4), 477–506. doi: 10.2307/40071679.
- Duchan, J. S. (2012). Recordings, Technology, and Discourse in Collegiate Pop *a cappella*. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 125(498), 488–502. doi: 10.5406/jamerfolk.125.498.0488.
- Frizzell, J. D. (2015). An A Capella Talk with Deke Sharon. *Choral Director*, 12(3), 7–10.
- Godmilow, J., & Shapiro, A.-L. (1997). How Real Is the Reality in Documentary Film? *History and Theory*, 36(4), 80–101. doi: 10.1111/0018-2656.00032.
- Jones, S. K. (2016). A comparative case study of non-music major participation in two contrasting collegiate choral ensembles. *Music Education Research*, 20(2), 252–264. doi: 10.1080/14613808.2016.1257594.
- Rabinowitz, P. (1993). Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory. *History and Theory*, 32(2), 119–137. doi: 10.2307/2505348.

Appendix

Link to upload of “Brothers, Sing On: the Story of Nuance” on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/2OUCUlwPzn8>