

'Christmas With The Lettermen' Set For December

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"Christmas with the Lettermen" will be presented at the Reg Lenna Civic Center at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 1.

The Lettermen will perform a Christmas concert in their own unique style of harmony. The evening also will be a celebration of WJTN radio's 75th anniversary.

In the summer of 1961, The Lettermen hit the charts with their first Capital single, "The Way You Look Tonight," which eventually sold more than a million copies, gaining them their first gold record. The soft, melodic sounds were a departure from the hard, driving music of the day, but listener requests made it a must for radio playlists nationwide. In almost every poll the Lettermen became "Best New Group" or "Best Vocal Group." Their next two singles, "When I Fall in Love" and "Come Back, Silly Girl," also soared up the charts. In February 1962, their debut LP, "A Song for Young Love," climbed to No. 1 on the national charts shortly after its release and remained on the charts well into 1963, earning the trio a second gold record.

Though personnel in the trio changed by the end of the '60s, the trio continued to produce chart-

making records throughout the '60s and mid-'70s with hits such as "Put Your Head on My Shoulder" in 1968 and "Hurt So Bad," released in mid-1969, which remained on the charts for much of the early '70s for a fifth gold record. Other hits were "Traces/Memories" in 1970, "Feelings" in 1972 and "Alive Again - Naturally" in 1973. Their biggest hit, "Goin' Out of My Head/Can't Take My Eyes Off You," was unique when released. It was the first hit record ever to completely integrate two songs into one.

Today's Lettermen include the originator of the trio, Tony Butala. Donovan Tea and Darren Dowler. Butala was born in Sharon, Pa., and began his singing career at age 8 in Pittsburgh. After a few years he moved to California to join the famed Mitchell Boys Choir, with whom he sang in such movies as *On Moonlight Bay*, *White Christmas*, *Peter Pan* and *War of the Worlds*.

Early vocal combinations, including one with Connie Stevens in high school, eventually led Butala to develop the well-known "Lettermen sound" in 1957 - a signature sound that has remained intact ever since.

Tea was born in Houston and

started his professional singing career at age 17 when he won an international vocal competition in Guilford, England. After touring Europe and singing in such prestigious places as the Sistine Chapel, Notre Dame Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, he returned home to sing in the Hollywood Bowl with the L.A. Master Chorale. At 18, Tea became a lead singer for the Young Americans, opening for such performers as Sammy Davis Jr., Rich Little and Tony Bennett. He guest starred on NBC's holiday special *Merry Christmas, Fred*. From the *Crosbys*, performed a tap dance with Fred Astaire and sang backup with Bing Crosby on *White Christmas*. He left the Young Americans at 22 to become a solo act. He moved to Las Vegas, where he was featured in two main-room extravaganzas at the Dunes and Stardust hotels. It was in Las Vegas that Donovan first crossed paths with the Lettermen. Then in the fall of 1984, he became a member of the famed trio.

Dowler was destined to become a singer, actor, dancer, guitarist and songwriter early because of his musical genes. He started performing professionally in nightclubs and theatres right out of high school. Landing a small first tele-

vision role in 1984 in the well-known soap *As The World Turns* led to more prominent roles in the series *Swamp Thing* and *The Adventures of Superboy* as well as character roles on MTV. His headline talent was displayed in one of the hottest nightclub acts in the country at the famed "Club R" in Orlando. Dowler's theatrical credits include *Elvis, a Musical Celebration* on Broadway as well as roles in *Of Mice and Men*, *Grease*, *Oklahoma*, *The Deadly Game* and *Napoleon, the Night before Waterloo*.

Dowler has many talents, some of which he uses in his television and radio voice-over work, which includes the star's voice in an animated children's series, *The Reppies*.

He also impersonates a multitude of music's top celebrities, from Sammy Davis Jr. to Michael Bolton. His vast repertoire of talents makes him adept at all musical styles. Dowler became the newest member of the The Lettermen in the fall of 1995.

Tickets for "Christmas with the Lettermen" are available at the Reg Lenna box office and JCC box office and at Wise Apples, Second Avenue, Warren, or charge by phone at 484-7070.