

SHOWCASE

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Oak Ridge pulls in harmony

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When it comes to the Oak Ridge Boys, member Joe Bonsall puts aside his ego to work for the common good of the group — even when it means that none of his own songs get included on their new album.

"The bad news for me is I didn't get a song on the album," said Bonsall in a phone interview from Norman, Okla., where the band performed at the opening ceremonies of the U.S. Olympic Festival.

"The good news is, the songs we came up with were a whole lot better than anything I've been writing. We're not one of those acts that say, 'Hey man, I write 'em, so we sing 'em.' We look for the best songs. And that inspires me to work on my writing a little bit more."

The Oak Ridge Boys bring their characteristic four-part country harmony sound to the Redman Grandstand at 8 p.m. Tuesday.

According to Bonsall, who has been with the Oak Ridge Boys since 1973, "Our mentality is a group mentality. One for all and all for one. I've always felt like the Oak Ridge Boys, when we're all pulling together in one direction, can do anything we want to do."

Apparently, the formula — which also includes members Duane Allen, Richard Sterban and Steve Sanders — is one that works. Over the past dozen years, the vocal group has scored

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a string of country hits that include "Elvira" (which has reached classic status), "This Crazy Love," "Little Things," "Gonna Take A Lot of River" and "Beyond Those Years." Their *Greatest Hits Volume 3* is working its way up the Billboard charts, as is their latest single "An American Family" (included

on the group's 19th MCA album, scheduled for September release).

And while the four vocalists bring their own personalities to the stage intact, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This was proven, said Bonsall, when the group voted out longtime member William Lee Golden a few years ago because he was going in a different

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THE OAK RIDGE BOYS specialize in four-part country harmonies. The group plays at 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Redman Grandstand at the Antelope Valley Fair.

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direction than the rest of the group. "The Oak Ridge Boys is a powerful entity," said Bonsall. "The parts can be changed, as long as we got a strong enough person to fill the spot. I must go on to tell you that nobody's planning to leave, at all."

One of the Oaks' strengths is each member's vocal prowess: "We're still the only (country) act that can give you big time four-part harmony," said Bonsall, who learned the technique when he sang with various gospel groups.

Another reason for success is the group's insistence on quality, he added. "The magic of the Oak Ridge Boys is that hard work ethic and putting everything we got into it all the time. I think people appreciate that about us."

Indeed, a performance by the Oak Ridge Boys is exhilarating, as evidenced in a Memorial weekend show at the Riverside Resort in Laughlin, Nev. With four powerful vocalists contributing rather than the one typical lead singer, the energy level

starts out on high. The only place it can go is up.

"We all know that the entity is bigger than the parts," said Bonsall. "So if Richard Sterban gets a big hand on a song, that's great. If Steve Sanders is singing lead on our latest single and it goes No. 1, that's fabulous. If I go out there and be something the audience really likes, that's great. It all benefits the Oak Ridge Boys.

"We all care about one another," he added, commenting on the longevity of the group, which originally started as a gospel group in 1945. (Allen has been with the group the longest, having joined in 1966.) "We've already outlived most people."

"It's amazing. We've seen a lot of different acts come and go. We've seen a lot of philosophies come and go in country music," he said. "Our philosophy is, you go out there on stage every night, do your music the best you can do it, put them on a power show and try to make good records."