

I FELL IN LOVE WITH MUSIC

Portland singer makes prime-time debut

Michael Odokara- Okigbo says appearing on NBC's The Sing- Off has pushed him toward a music career.

By **RAY ROUTHIER**

StaffWriter

Win or lose, Michael Odokara-Okigbo says being on the NBC talent show 'The Sing- Off' has already paid big dividends for

him.

The Portland resident and Dartmouth College senior said his experience on the show - which was filmed over the summer and is airing Mondays this fall - convinced him that he needs to pursue a career in music.

Odokara- Okigbo has long loved singing as an extracurricular activity. He is majoring in global health and had thought about going to work in the area of disease prevention. But that was before he and the Dartmouth Aires a cappella group got the chance to be part of a nationally televised music show.

'Now I know I really, really want to go into music as a career,' said Odokara- Okigbo, a graduate of Portland's Waynflete School. 'I fell in love with music all over again doing this.' Odokara- Okigbo and the Dartmouth Aires will be competing

OKIGBO against 15 other a cappella singing groups for the show's grand prize - \$200,000 and a Sony Music recording contract. The group's first appearance on the show will air tonight.

Odokara- Okigbo can't say how his group does on the show, but he could reveal that one of the songs they performed was Stevie Wonder's 'Higher Ground.' He also said that competing against so many talented a cappella groups helped reinforce in his mind what a challenging endeavor a cappella singing is.

'With all voices and no instruments, it's easy to go off beat, or to hear a problem with pitch,' said Odokara- Okigbo, speaking from Dartmouth, in Hanover, NH.

Odokara- Okigbo says he loved the experience of performing on a network TV show, and working with entertainment professionals.

'There were so many incredible things we experienced, working with the choreographers, the music staff, the producers, everyone was so open and giving,' said Odokara-Okigbo. 'The audience was so energetic, and we tried to have a lot of fun on stage. I'm excited for people in

Maine to watch it.' The show will air weekly on Mondays at 8 p.m., with groups being eliminated each week. Once the competition is down to three groups, viewers will get a chance to vote for their favorites. The winner will be announced during the Nov. 28 finale.

Odokara- Okigbo said he probably started singing 'in my mom's womb' and has loved music as long as he can remember. As a youngster, he tried to emulate the moves of Michael Jackson. His family moved from Maryland to Maine when he was 12, and he joined various groups and choirs here.

At Waynflete, he said he was co- founder of an a cappella singing group. He had seen the Dartmouth Aires perform and 'fell in love' with the group even before he applied to Dartmouth. Besides being a member of the Dartmouth Aires, the college's oldest a cappella group, Odokara-Okigbo has also sung with the school's Gospel Choir and has been a member of the rowing team. Last year he spent time in India, working at an orphanage.

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Michael Odokara- Okigbo of Portland, third row from front, second from left, sings with the Dartmouth Aires, a group that will make its first appearance on ' The Sing- Off' today.