

Nothing can keep Vocal Point tenor Jaren McMillan, left, and beat-boxer Alex Brown from singing.



Voice Lessons

Speech challenges are no impediment for two Vocal Point singers.

By Denya I. Palmer (BA '16)

The kick. The hi-hat. The snare.

"That was the genesis," says BYU student Alex C. Brown ('24). As a 14-year-old struggling with mild Tourette's syndrome and a stutter, Brown came across a YouTube video that broke down these three basic beatboxing sounds—and he determined to master them. "In about three weeks, I [went] from being the weird kid who makes sounds to the cool kid who makes sounds."

Growing up "I would randomly make humming noises or cough at very specific intervals," Brown explains. In beatboxing Brown found a way to channel his voice.

When he took his skills to the stage as a teen at BYU's ReMix Vocal Academy in 2015, "the audience was literally going crazy, just screaming and cheering" for him, says Brown's mother, Emilie de Azevedo Brown (BA '96). "My husband [and I] were laughing and crying."

Now as the beatboxer for Vocal Point, BYU's premier male cappella group, Brown can imitate everything from drums to a zipper to video game pings and beeps. In the singing group, Brown found a kindred spirit in tenor Jaren N. N. McMillan (BS '22), who also sings through a stutter.

"We call ourselves the stutter brothers sometimes," Brown says. "We joke about it because we're people who can barely talk, and yet we're in one of the most prestigious singing groups at BYU."

McMillan agrees: "We've really bonded over it. People with speech impediments like me, we never imagine that we'll be on a big stage talking or performing." And yet they both take the stage, this year performing in concerts across the country in Vocal Point's first tour since the start of the pandemic.

Brown has also used his voice to pursue passions beyond beatboxing. "I stutter, and I have Tourette's, and yet I've worked as a voice actor, a singer, and a beatboxer," he says.

"My whole life, the stutter and the Tourette's

"People with speech impediments, ...we never imagine that we'll be on a big stage." —Jaren McMillan

were two of my biggest weaknesses," says Brown. "Rather than take away that trial, the Lord helped me channel that into beatboxing. [It's now] a key part of my identity and one of the main ways that I've found to help others."

WATCH

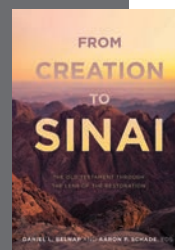
Scan to hear beat-boxer Alex Brown drop a beat.



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

From Creation to Sinai

The Religious Studies Center published *From Creation to Sinai*, by religion professors Daniel L. Belnap (BA '96, MA '99) and Aaron P. Schade (BA '95). The book explores Old Testament narratives with modern revelation and academic insights.



CAMPUS NOTE

Class of 2022 in the House

Graduating Cougars donned their caps and gowns to line up outside the Marriott Center this April for BYU's first in-person graduation ceremony since the COVID-19 pandemic began two years ago.

KENNEDY CENTER

Leading the World

Grad students Isabella M. Errigo (BS '20) and Liam B. Smith (BA '17) received the new Global Leaders Scholarship from the Utah Council for Citizen Diplomacy. They will participate in international conferences with 10 other recipients.

LIFE SCIENCES

Better Treatments

Microbiology and molecular biology professor Mary Feller Davis (BS '08) found that people with high genetic risk for multiple sclerosis will likely face an earlier onset of the disease. These findings could help improve MS treatment.

