

Four Freshmen Join in Festive Stan Kenton Celebration

by Lillian Arganian (MI)

Well they go together like coffee and cream, don't they. Strawberries and shortcake. A fit like a hand-in-glove. It evolved to where people were saying, "Hey! You've gotta hear this band! They sound just like the Four Freshmen!" You know the story.

So it was as natural as breathing that the Frosh would appear at the four-day celebration of the life and music of Stan Kenton, called Balboa Rendezvous, in Newport Beach, California, October 23-26, 2003. We were lucky. They appeared twice. And sent us all to nirvana.

It was late in the afternoon on Saturday, the sky a smoky haze from the not-too-distant Southern California wildfires, the sun a coral orb as it gently receded over the shell of the outdoor amphitheater toward the Pacific. And it was just one gorgeous hit after another as the guys started off with their great opener, "Day In, Day Out," followed by "You Stepped Out of a Dream," and then the most gorgeous "Invitation" you could ever imagine, done with a bolero beat.

Time for wise guy-isms. "Yes, we are the original Four Freshmen!" (Were they checking to see if we all were awake? Or possibly all under 30?) Then "Young and Foolish" and "You've Got Me Crying Again."

(Note to myself: The new guy is GOOD. Fits right in!) That would be Curtis Calderon, and by now he is an old-timer, going on three! Curtis sings the second part and plays trumpet and flugelhorn with the group. In fact, he is SO GOOD that someone remarked to me after the gig, "If that guy ever wanted to make a career of just playing trumpet, he'd be great!"

Brian Eichenberger's solo was up next, on "If I Only Had A Brain," but as he eased into the song, he noted that one of those huge mikes that are mounted on big tripods was aimed backwards, toward the audience instead of the stage. "That mike looks as though it's set up to record your thoughts," he mused. (Too funny!) This tune gave Vince Johnson the opportunity to whistle a few bars, and then they all joined in.

After introductions of the group to the audience, the Freshmen sang "Something's Gotta Give," and then the most perfectly beautiful rendering of "Indian Summer," with the feel of autumn all around us. It was mostly a cappella. Next was "I'd Go All the Way Round the World (to be with You" - a new song?) and then the totally gorgeous "Angel Eyes." Bob Ferreira introduced the next "well-known" tune, and Brian added helpfully, "It's so well-known we don't even have to do it!" But they did, a beautiful arrangement by Vince of "September Song," and it carried forth the autumn theme.

I do believe Brain now OWNS "I'm Gonna Go Fishin' (and Catch Me A Trout)". Best rendition this writer has ever heard of this great tune.

Two Freshmen classics, "In This Whole Wide World" and "Day By Day" elicited "oohs" from the audience and then another gorgeous performance of "You Call It Madness (But I Call It Love)" just sucked whatever breath was left in people out of them.

(I know we keep saying this whenever there's a change, but really - isn't this the best Freshmen group EVER?!)

A beautiful arrangement by Brian of "Every Time We Say Goodbye," performed without drums, was next, then an uptempo version of "That Old Feeling," with some pyrotechnics by Calderon on trumpet. Their closer for this set was a kickin' "After You've Gone."

No surprise at all that the Frosh received a very warm and enthusiastic standing ovation, and they responded with their famous a cappella version of "Their Hearts Were Full of Spring."

A few hours later the guys hopped onstage at the Plaza Auditorium, this time dressed to the nines and looking *soooooo* sharp. What followed was the most amazing concert - perfection, in the fabulous sound we all know and love, Backed by an all-star big band, the Freshmen were awesome.

After the spirited "Day In, Day Out" they followed with the gorgeous "Poinciana" and left everyone breathless. "There Will Never Be Another You" and "In This Whole Wide World" were next. Love how the guys groove together! "Route 66" was their kicker closer. Too soon, too soon, they hopped off the stage and were gone.

The Sound is Magic, and lives on. How many ways can you say "sensational"?!

Balboa Rendezvous was in total a magnificent event, put on and coordinated by Ken Poston and the Los Angeles Jazz Institute. Featuring fifteen concerts, seven panels and three historic film showings in a four-day span, it showcased many Kenton alumni, including Bill Holman, Lennie Niehaus, Mike Vax, Chris Connor, Dave Barduhn, Bill Trujillo, Lee Konitz, Kim Richmond, Buddy Childers, Marvin Stamm, Gabe Baltazar, Joel Kaye, Jack Costanzo, Frank Capp, Mike Suter, Steve Huffsteter, Carl Saunders and many others, all in outstanding performances.

For a full five-installment account of Balboa Rendezvous, go to the Kenton website:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Kentonia>

If you're new to this site, you'll need to sign in and create a password, but it's free. Then type in:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Kentonia/message/20087>

and follow the sequence Balboa Rendezvous - Thursday through Sunday, by "rubbychalice2002" (my yahoo name). There are many other references to the event as well.