

The Jazz Cruise 2009 with THE FOUR FRESHMEN

November 8-15, 2009

by Jim Bell

On Sunday, November 8, a group of 1,900 jazz lovers embarked from Ft. Lauderdale on Holland America's Westerdam for a week of "straight-ahead" jazz in the Caribbean. Of course, the anchor with top billing was our guys, "The Four Freshmen".

They performed stand alone gigs on Monday at 1:00 p.m., Tuesday at 4:00 p.m., and Wednesday at 10:30 p.m. in various venues throughout the ship playing tunes from the Great American Songbook: "Route 66", "Day By Day", "Laura", "Rain", to name a few, plus, Bob got everyone's attention with "How Do You Keep the Music Playing". After the performance, the ship was buzzing about The Four Freshmen. For many, it was the first time they had heard the guys and for others, they were happy to have found them again. Tuesday's session was a flashback to "the Cave" in Bowling Green. The venue was way too cold. Vince was blowing into his hands to stay warm so he could sing and play the Bass.

Thursday they performed with the 18 piece Anita E. Berry's Big Band in the largest venue on the ship which seats 900 people. The Big Band was directed by Ken Peplowski who also played the Sax and Clarinet, Butch Miles on Drums, Warren Vache on Trumpet, John Fedchoch on Trombone & Arranger, Wycliffe Gordon on Trombone, Gerald Stafford on Trumpet, and my favorite James Chirrillo on Guitar, with Johnny Mandel, legendary composer and arranger, making sure no one goofed, plus many other world renowned musicians. The band was screaming. The Four Freshmen rocked the house opening with "Day In Day Out" followed by "Poinciana", "If I Had You", "Walking My Baby Back Home", "Fools Rush In", "Rain", Greg Stegeman's arrangement of "Live Trombones", "Mam'selle", "Angel Eyes", and "Somebody Loves Me". The crowd was jumping. The session closed out with one of Curtis's favorites "It's All Right with Me", among others. Brian was outstanding on lead vocal as well as directing the big band. The evening ended with a standing ovation. I am sure that they made many new fans and future society members.

Friday at 2:00 p.m, they did a casual fun gig. Into the set, Bob asked Jeff Hamilton to join them on the snares which he did. He jammed with Curtis on "Another You", "It's a Blue World", "After You've Gone", and "Graduation Day", and closed out five great sets with our guys at sea.

No matter when we see The Four Freshmen be it with a big band, a symphony orchestra, in a jazz club, at a world famous concert hall, or on a ship, they always give a fantastic performance. We look forward to the next time we are together in Annapolis or before.

ROAD SHOW

Ted Driscoll, Past President

FFS Ohio

Editors Note;

The following article was submitted to Fresh News in the summer of 2007 but was never printed. This report on the Freshmen performance with the Columbus OH JAZZ ORCHESTRA was written by former FFS President Ted Driscoll. Ted's comments on this concert reflects his life long involvement with the music business and a similar affection for the music of The Four Freshmen. This is just too good to not include, even at this late date.

Recently, my old friend of almost 60 years, Nick Alexander, invited us to join him and Barbara at a "Road Show" performance by the Columbus OH Jazz Orchestra and The Four Freshmen. Every time I hear one of these concerts, it occurs to me that Stan Kenton could have been another Igor Stravinsky if he were born in the nineteenth-century complex tempos and harmonies, unusual intervals, and extraordinary creativity with his compositions. He sure knew how to put a team of musicians and arrangers(like Pete Rugolo)together, just as The Columbus Jazz Orchestra does. He also knew how to find great musicians in Dayton OH.

The orchestra led off with "Stompin' at the Savoy" smooth tenor saxes, with counterpoint provided by a well-balanced trombone section and a powerful trumpet accompaniment. Kelly Crum's vocal rendition of "Something Cool" was not reminiscent of June Christy. Her phrasing emphasis was quite a bit different. "How High the Moon" was done with precision among all of the sections but with a faster tempo than the original Kenton orchestra arrangement. "Bernie's Tune" produced a very interesting three-way communication among the bass player, the drummer, and the pianist.

Enter the Four Freshmen they started out with "If I Had You", then "Little Girl Blue." The single-microphone arrangement was perfect for delicate, soft songs such as those. The tone-colors of their voices are extremely compatible. Intonation, enunciation, attacks and cut-offs, and even the subtle "passing tones" were, to me, sung flawlessly. Brian, during both of these songs, accompanied on his Taylor thin-body, with acoustic-electric guitar. His technique produces a soft, appealing, pure acoustic sound with just the right volume and expression; consequently, you are essentially hearing a "fifth voice." If "Little Girl Blue" composers Rodgers and Hart would have been up in the balcony, they most likely would have said " yes, that is what we had in mind when we wrote that song."

The pace changed with "Day In, Day Out" once again, with dazzling accompaniment from the orchestra. "Poinciana"(my all-time favorite) was next, and performed beautifully. Curtis' cornet solo was a clinic on horn playing subtle and complex phrasing, wide variations of tone-color, and a broad range of expression. It is interesting that he plays a cornet instead of a trumpet. The cornet(possessing a conically shaped mouthpiece receiver), typically has a mellower quality than the trumpet(which has a cylindrically shaped mouthpiece receiver), designed for brilliance and projection. But,Curtis produces a cornet, trumpet, and even, at times, a flugelhorn quality of sound one horn, three different responses.

"Intermission Riff" displayed the talent of their outstanding pianist, and, a guest pianist somewhat different piano solos; but both exciting solos. The Columbus Jazz Orchestra captured the Stan Kenton orchestra masterpiece, "Peanut Vendor" absolutely magnificently.... driving rhythm section, fiery trombone solo section, and a trumpet section that sounded like five Maynard Fergusons and a couple of Mike Beisners trumpets played with precisely the same brilliance, tone-color, and intonation. At one point they all hit a double-hi "F" in perfect unison.