

1959 Concert Review

On the surface, the appearance of The Four Freshmen at the 1959 Newport Jazz Festival might seem an odd booking. And yet, the vocal group from Indiana had done recordings with the Stan Kenton Orchestra and with arranger Pete Rugolo which received critical acclaim. The members of the group also played instruments while singing and, in at least a couple of cases, were solidly swinging jazz improvisors. But it was their ability to create lush, harmonically sophisticated chord voicings within appealing pop songs that gained them a wide following. Not as full of improvisational verve as Lambert, Hendricks & Ross to be sure, but ambitious nonetheless. The four gentlemen comprising The Four Freshmen - brothers Don and Ross Barbour, Bob Flanigan, and Ken Albers, charmed the Newport audience with their professionally run show, which included renditions of many jazz standards. Their 2nd set was marred, however, by the presence of a stubbornly out-of-tune guitar that Don Barbour struggled with throughout the course of the show. Nevertheless, the Newport crowd could be heard cheering for more at the end of their hour-long performance at Freebody Park in Newport, Rhode Island.



Following Newport program announcements from master of ceremonies Willis Conover, from Voice of America, and band introductions from The Four Freshmen spokesman, drummer Ross Barbour, they kicked it off with a snappy, upbeat rendition of George Gershwin's "Somebody Loves Me." While it is clear from the outset that Don Barbour's guitar was badly out of tune and being distorting through the sound system, they plowed ahead and Ken Albers delivered a jazz trumpet solo in the middle of that oft-covered chestnut, which is underscored by Ross' deft brushwork on the kit. "You're All I See" is a bit of a lush schmaltz with an appealing trombone solo by Bob Flanigan, while the exotic "Grenada" features a opening trumpet fanfare by Albers that set the proper tone for this flamenco flavored piece. I heard Guitarist Don Barbour trying to adjust his intonation in time for the fourth tune, the harmonically rich jazz ballad "Angel Eyes," to no avail. But in spite of his rough going, trombonist Flanigan delivered a beautiful trombone solo that salvaged the gorgeous piece.

They swung their way through "There Will Never Be Another You," with drummer Ross Barbour setting a brisk tone with his brushwork and Flanigan offering another convincing trombone solo. The intonation problems on the guitar were eliminated on the next piece which was an acappella version of the wistful ballad "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." Then drummer Ross stepped forward for his vocal feature of the set, offering a comical Donald Duck voiced take on the standard "Sweet Lorraine," which the crowd seems to respond to with good natured laughs. A mambo rendition of "Day by Day," a big hit for the group in 1955, features another potent trombone solo by Flanigan and The Four Freshmen close their set on a rousing note with "Mr. B's Blues," their first single cut in 1950 for Capitol which launched them on their way.



THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES!

TOP: Frank DiOrio and Stan

BOTTOM: Stan, June and Frank

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