

"Here's that Rainy Night"

by Dick Hatfield, Ohio Rep

It was pouring profusely on September 29th at 6:50pm when we downed our umbrellas and entered the doors of Yoder Hall at Bluffton University. Mel and Barb Meyers were already there manning the Fresh sales table. The four of us, Guy and Rosie Infante, and Kathy and I joined them. Soon thereafter Donna Galloway came by.

The concert would begin at 7:30 and all seats were sold out. Mel said that Brian and Vince had remarked about how good the acoustics were during the sound check that afternoon.

We soon found that out when the Four Freshmen strode on stage and took over. They elegantly sang all of those gems you came to hear, plus four new ones took us by surprise: remarkable versions of *Stardust*, *A Nightingale Sang on Berkeley Square*, *With Plenty of Money and You*, and a freshly written *Always Trust Your Heart* (I hope I got that title right). All are to be included in a new album debuting next April.

The Bluffton concert was the finale of September performances in four Ohio cities. And may I mention that Curtis and Bob both got their haircut in downtown Bluffton. Curtis chimed that his cost \$40, and Bob's was only two bucks.

Ohio loves the Four Freshmen!



Kathy Hatfield, Curtis, Rosie Infante and Vince pose after the concert at Bluffton University.

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Don Barbour: 50 Years Later

By Wayne Corey, FFS-Wisconsin

Where was Don Barbour's music headed? October 5th is the 50th anniversary of Don's tragic death. He had just begun his recording career as a single. "The Solo Voice of Don Barbour" would be released on Capitol Records soon after his death at 34.

The history of jazz is filled with "What if?" questions. What if Bird hadn't been such an addict? What if Bix hadn't been such a boozier? What if Chet Baker hadn't been so, well, wasted. These "What if?" questions in jazz all ask the same thing: how would their music have evolved if they hadn't died so young. 50 years after "The Solo Voice of Don Barbour," Four Freshmen fans still have questions about Don and his music.

"Solo Voice" had a different Don Barbour vocal approach than Four Freshmen fans had heard during the 1950s. Don was the group's featured solo vocalist, beginning with their first recording sessions. Indeed, Baltimore Oriole, the only song from Don's Freshmen years repeated on "Solo Voice," was apparently the first track ever recorded by the Freshmen. Capitol Records files say the recording took place April 14, 1950 at the WMGM radio studios in New York City. That take on Baltimore Oriole remained unissued until the Mosaic box set in 2000. Nearly three years later Baltimore Oriole was recorded again and issued as the flip side of Poinciana. Don's vocal spotlighted his powerful baritone that seemed to jump out of our radio speakers in those years. On "Solo Voice" Baltimore Oriole is given a more subdued approach. That's true of much of that album.

When soloing with the Freshmen, Don could certainly be considered a jazz singer. Listen to Don's vocal interplay with Bob Flanagan's trombone on Circus. 1952's Stormy Weather swings hard! Or check out Don on both the 1950 studio take and the 1958 "In Person" track of Billy Eckstine's Mr. B's Blues. That's jazz. Heck, that's soul! Don may have been the first blue-eyed soul singer, doing vocally throughout the 1950s what Bill Medley & Bobby Hatfield of the Righteous Brothers would do in the mid-1960s.

But "Solo Voice" isn't jazz or blues. "Solo Voice" is a really good album of that era filled with what the liner notes call "jazz-inflected popular singing." It is decidedly a pop vocal album. Bob Bain wrote the charts and had cats like Shelly Manne, Al Viola and Jimmy Hendrickson on the band. Don and company come close to cutting loose on *Cry Me a River* and *While You Are Gone* but most of the time the musical atmosphere is restrained, when compared with Don's Freshmen solos. The jazz inflections and the soul are missing from "Solo Voice." It was obviously a decision made by Don and producer Dave Cavanaugh.

So, where was Don's music going? Personally, I like to believe that Don would have returned to belting the type of blues-tinged uptempo songs we loved in the 1950s and still love today. Two of the premier male singers of that era, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Junior, were both adding harder edges to their uptempo songs. Don could have done it, but, sadly, we'll never know.

This is the 50th anniversary of the death of another brilliant young jazz musician. Most of us don't remember, or ever heard of, Scott LaFaro. I became interested in him two years ago when I began serious listening to Bill Evans and discovered "Sunday at the Village Vanguard," a spectacular reissue of a brilliant Orrin Keepnews production from June 25, 1961. The music is by Evans' most remarkable trio, featuring LaFaro on bass and Paul Motian on drums. The trio was determined to be a true "group," and not just a piano player with a rhythm section. They succeeded. LaFaro, at 25, does things on the bass that hadn't been heard before and probably haven't been heard since. The listener keeps asking, "How did he do that?" Scott LaFaro died in a car crash 10 days after this amazing album was recorded. I highly recommend "Sunday at the Village Vanguard."

What if? What if Don Barbour and Scott LaFaro had not died too early just as their music-making abilities were beginning to peak? We can ask the same question about Clifford Brown. This is the 55th anniversary of his untimely death at age 25. The Washington Post called him "the most brilliant trumpet player of his generation" in a recent major article observing the anniversary. This writer agrees.

The Post said of Clifford Brown, "His music endures, full of joy." That is also true of the music of Don Barbour and Scott LaFaro. We remain fortunate to have their music all of these years later.