

# Remembering Ruth Alcivar

by Bob Alcivar, California

During our younger years we were brought together by two musical forces: Stan Kenton and The Four Freshmen. Ruth and I happened to meet while standing in line for a Kenton concert in Seattle. Neither of us knew at the time that we shared this common musical interest. At The Seattle Armory we sat together in the front row, directly facing the bandstand and were totally carried away, nearly in tears from the strength and beauty of Kenton's thrilling music. Eddie Safranski, Buddy Childers, Shelly Manne, Kai Winding and Vido Musso were among the musicians in the band at the time. The Pastels vocal group were absent, but I had found their singles earlier - "After You" and "No Greater Love." During our courtship we listened to those singles over and over again. I became enormously inspired and eventually started vocal groups in Seattle because of Kenton's musical influence.

Later, when Ruthie and I first heard the single "Blue World" we thought we had died and gone to heaven. We could hardly believe a vocal group was singing such wonderful harmonies in those days. It was inspiration from Stan Kenton and The Four Freshmen who jump-started us on our music career. She was also a huge fan of Don Barbour, who gave her guidance and some wonderful 2nd part (alto) tips. We formed The Signatures, a vocal group and were introduced to Kenton by Seattle jazz promoter, Norm Bobrow. I played piano and The Signatures sang for Stan after one of his Seattle concerts and as he listened he brightened up with that beautiful smile of his. He loved us and encouraged all of us to play instruments to back ourselves up as The Freshmen had done earlier. Ruth had played drums in high school band, so she picked up stand-up drums with a lot of help and inspiration from Ross Barbour, nearly duplicating his drum set up.

While working at the Village Vanguard and the Left Bank jazz clubs in New York, Kenton introduced us to George Avakian, East Coast head of the newly formed Warner Brothers Records. Avakian produced our first LP for Warners, "The Signatures Sign In." To our delight and honor, Hal Kratsch had joined our group, singing bass and playing trumpet and mellophone. At the end of one session, George asked Hal to overdub his mellophone solos. He had him do one particular solo over many times. When Hal finally asked in frustration, "George, am I doing something wrong?" Avakian chuckled and said "No, I just couldn't wait to hear what you were going to play next." Of course, all the solos were superb! George let Hal pick out his favorite. Aside from his instrumental talents, Hal was probably the greatest bass singer in the world. He added a sound and soul to The Signatures that we would never replace after his untimely death.

Our road days with The Signatures were filled with excitement. We would meet up with The Freshmen whenever our groups were playing in close-by cities. We even alternated with The Freshmen at a club in Baltimore. We spent our intermissions listening to each other. Oh, such bliss!

We got together in a backstage dressing room after our shows and did some serious singing for each other...til the wee hours. To our surprise, Flanigan had learned the top lead part for our

"Can I Forget You" arrangement. He insisted on singing with us on that acappella chart. We were delighted! He sang every note accurately with his strong and clear "Freshmen Sound" voice. That evening Don asked Ruth if she sweat when singing her 2nd part. He figured all altos must sweat as he did. She answered, "Yes." Don was always a musical joy to both of us. Ruth would cry when listening to his beautiful live version of "Old Folks." One of a kind Don Barbour! They don't make 'em like that anymore.

When Ruth began to decline from Alzheimer's Disease, I called and spoke with Ross more than a few times. He was so warm and concerned about Ruth and most supportive of me. He asked me to describe my years as a caregiver, then came up with an idea. "Bob, I want you to write a song about what you have told me" he said. When I said I wasn't a lyricist, he told me to call Arthur Hamilton ("Cry Me A River"). He could write the lyric and I the music. Arthur and I had collaborated on a couple of songs in the past, so Ross' idea was a good one. Arthur came out to my house within a few days after I told him of Ross' request. Then I spoke to him as I had Ross, describing my experiences and feelings while caring for Ruth. He went home, and in a few days came up with the most warm, sensitive and loving lyric. I proceeded to set it to music, then made an orchestral track. Now we're looking for a singer to record it. It's called "Remembering Things." The Freshmen Society will be the first to know when the CD is ready.

My wife, Ruth Alcivar, beautiful, blonde, talented singer, drummer and mom, will be fondly remembered by the many people that her life touched, both musically and personally. Ruth passed away on May 15, 2006, after a long battle with Alzheimer's Disease. I will always remember her and our 50-plus years of marriage. We shared a most beautiful and unforgettable musical life together.

It's amazing how people influence our lives in so many ways. I would have never guessed during our early years, listening to "Blue World," that Ross Barbour would have such a continuing, comforting influence on my life. These were difficult years. Ruth and I owe so much to The Four Freshmen...forever.

**...Bob Alcivar**, award winning composer and arranger, continues to produce music from his home studio in the Northridge area of Los Angeles.

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