

WAYNE'S MUSIC WORLD:

By Wayne Corey, FFS Wisconsin

"PROFESSOR" GREG STEGEMAN

Wayne Corey has been a member of the Four Freshmen Society since 1991 and serves on the FFS corporate board of directors. A retired executive who has written for numerous publications and websites, he is a long-time Wisconsin and national Easter Seals volunteer and serves on the board of Easter Seals Wisconsin. He can be reached at Wayne.Corey.jazz@gmail.com.

Talking music with Greg Stegeman is like being in a college classroom. Ask a question and get an education. My education from "Professor" Stegeman started 20+ years ago when I learned Greg can help serious fans understand the special qualities of Four Freshmen songs. I had to smile appreciatively as Greg took the Wannabees into his "classroom" at the Four Freshmen Society 2013 convention.

The Four Freshmen have been harmonizing great songs since four guys from Indiana got together in 1948. We've heard many of those songs for many years. It's easy to take them for granted. But not just any piece of music can become a Four Freshmen song. Not every song "works." Greg Stegeman knows. Greg sang a dozen years with the Freshmen, most famously as the lead singer who followed Bob Flanigan, first when Flan was sidelined by a heart attack in 1990 and non-stop from 1992-1999 after Flan retired. That period included the much-hailed, hard-swinging FF Group #20. Greg has arranged a lot of FF songs and sung lots more. He knows what "works."

"It's a combination of two things. It has to be romantic in nature. The lyrics need to express a romantic interest. Musically it has to be harmonically rich. For that you have to go back to the standards," Greg told me. He mentions George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Harold Arlen as prime examples of composers who wrote songs that found a home in the Freshmen songbook.

Freshmen charts feature modern jazz harmonies, Greg points out. Siting Gershwin, Porter & Arlen he said, "the harmonies they use are sophisticated enough that the Freshmen approach seems very appropriate." The songs "have to be harmonically rich and you have to go back to the '30s, '40s & '50s for that. You get into the '60s and there were still guys who were writing new standards, like Johnny Mandel."

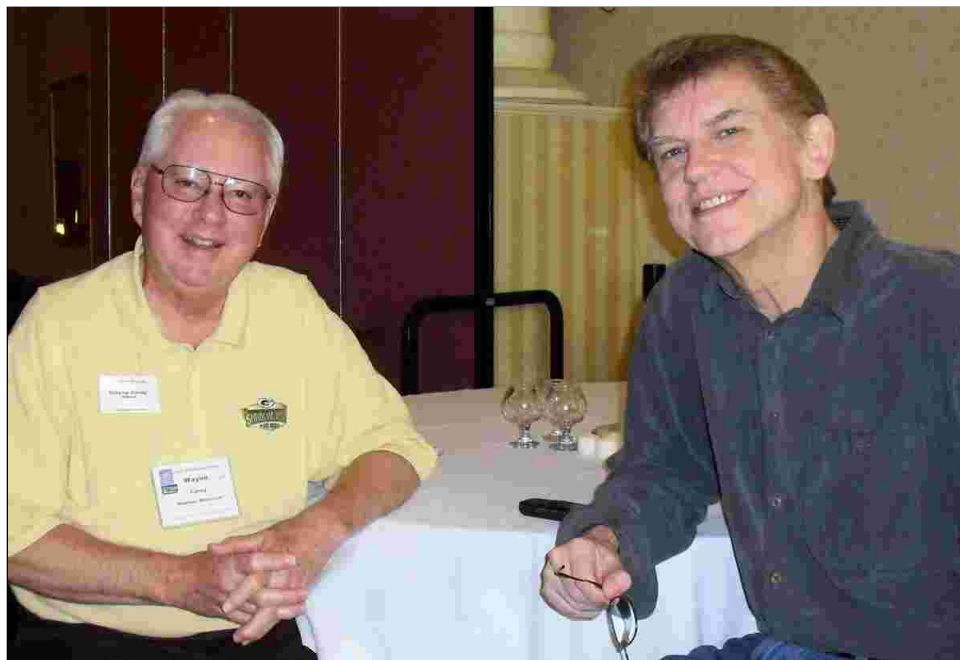
"The Freshmen deal with modern harmony, jazz harmony. More contemporary material – pop material

– generally uses simple triads. The Freshmen sounds use the seventh of the chord rather than just the root, third and fifth that you hear in rock & roll and pop music," Greg told me.

There is another key factor. "There are a lot of great standards that perhaps have too much movement in them. The simple things work...where the phrases are long. Sustained notes, not a lot of eighth notes. Not a lot of movement. The sustained harmonies draw people's ears into that sound. It's really those three things. The harmonic sophistication, romanticism and the songs themselves – the melodies – (that) are relatively simple.

"A perfect example would be *It's a Blue World*. There's very little movement in that song. (sings) 'It's a Blue World without you...' It's all... sustained. Very little lyrical movement. So the sustained harmonies are what make the dynamic sound."

The Freshmen sound includes movement of the 2nd and 3rd voices within a chord.



Wayne Corey & Greg Stegeman chat about music at the 2013 FFS Convention.

"When you hear that movement they are making that chord change. Generally speaking, most standards have a chord change every two beats in a measure where there are four beats. In a typical ballad, every two beats there is a chord change. So that is what you're hearing when you hear those 2nd and 3rd parts move. They're making that chord change. Perhaps the lead melody will remain the same but the inner parts are making the chord change. That's where you hear the movement," Greg says.

"What people don't realize...is that up-tempo arrangements are much more difficult to learn. In a ballad, you have the luxury of sustaining that tone. There's some movement but it's not going by quickly. (In a song) like *Route 66* it really takes a lot of rehearsal to get the up-tempo things together. (continued on page 10)