

Our President, Neil Lantz



70 YEARS & COUNTING

As I thought about the extraordinary 70-year performance record of the Four Freshmen, I began to wonder about the significance of all the 10-year celebrations of the group. Although I've been a Freshmen fan since my high school days in the mid-fifties, I couldn't recall some of the significant Four Freshmen milestones before my wife and I became members of the Society eighteen years ago. And so I wondered – beyond the first professional gig of the Freshmen in 1948, what happened in and near anniversary years that followed – 1958, 1968, 1978, and so on. Not surprising, I found many interesting answers in Ross Barbour's wonderful book *Now You Know, The Story of the Four Freshmen* (copies of which are still available in the Music Mart). The milestones I chose began on September 20, 1948 at the 113 Club in my hometown, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

1948 Brothers Ross and Don Barbour, cousin Bob Flanigan, and Hal Kratzsch, four young guys from the Jordan Conservatory of Butler University began the 70-year record as the Toppers, shortly thereafter renamed the Freshmen Four by their Chicago agent, and renamed a few weeks later by the guys – the Four Freshmen.

1958 While performing in Dayton, Ohio in 1950, the Freshmen met Stan Kenton who paved their way for a lengthy relationship with Capitol Records, beginning with their classic recording of *It's a Blue World*. Other events of significance during the 50s decade included personnel changes to the original group as Ken Errair replaced Hal Kratzsch. Errair would later be replaced by Ken Albers. In early 1956, the Four Freshmen made perhaps their greatest recording, *The Four Freshmen and Five Trombones*. A few years later, in October of their 10th Anniversary year, they offered an interesting contrast in musical dynamics for their newest album, as explained by Ross: "Instead of blaring trumpets, let's use strings. Rather than loud, let's be soft...slow, not fast." Then they went on the road for eighteen days with Maynard Ferguson "and his roaring band," along with the Dave Brubeck Quartet – quite a testimonial to the diverse dynamics of the three groups and the musical variations of the Four Freshmen.

1968 Seven years before the 20th Anniversary, original member Don Barbour left to pursue a solo career and was replaced by Bill Comstock. Sadly, Don was killed in an automobile accident. Significant international tours by the guys happened in the 60s decade and resulted in one of their most collectible LPs, *The Four Freshmen in Tokyo '68*. Their 20th Anniversary week was celebrated in September at The Embers in Indianapolis. By Christmas that year, according to Ross, after another busy year on the road all four guys were sick with the flu. He called them the sickest quartet in music history and jokingly renamed them the Four Fevers.

1978 Prior to the 30th Anniversary, August of 1977 marked the retirement of another great member of the original Freshmen, Ross Barbour. Bob Flanigan wrote the Anniversary Special of the *Fifth Freshmen*, the excellent Four Freshmen newsletter that had been previously written and produced by the creative mind of Ross. The special issue written by Bob gave credit to many of the folks who had supported the group over the years, including Stan Kenton, who died the next year, to arrangers Pete Rugolo and Dick Reynolds, and to the Freshmen fans. To the fans he wrote, "So to All of you in the over 2000
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MEMORIES



FIFTH FRESHMAN

CHRISTMAS ISSUE

KEN HERE

We wish to say a special - "Hello again" to you thousands of Friends around the world - who have expressed your interest, by letters and phone calls, for news about the "Four Freshmen" activities. You are, indeed, most flattering people. ---Good Friends usually are.

We plan to publish, again these periodicals of our endurance, with bits and pieces of our Travels, our personal delights, our successes and our failures. - It's nice to be back with you.

During the months of May, June and July, while still on The Road-Working Schedule, the group began planning a reorganization which has taken place. This reorganization was most amiable, most desired by departing members, and most rewarding with the acquirement of new membership. We wish, with you, to bid our Ross Barbour and our Ray Brown a happy and "Bon Voyage". --- We wish, likewise, for you to Cheer our Autie Goodman and our Dennis Grillo, two guys you're going to be surprised by. I hope, as in theatrics, I have successfully encouraged your curiosity.

Our Group rehearsed in Las Vegas the entire month of August. We cast off, anew, in Detroit at the "Michigan State Fair" to standing ovations and a promised return in '78, ---Our many one-niters have been well attended and our present "Columbia Artists Tour" of Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California (Via our Motor-Home) has been very gratifying.

We hope to meet you when we come within your area. And if we don't meet you for a while we do want to extend to you Our Wishes for a Most Joyous Christmas '77 and a Most Abundant New Year '78.

Ken

BOB HERE

In October we had a First, if you can imagine that. We had the privilege of touring with 3 other vocal groups. We did 17 days with "The Four Lads", "Ink Spots", "Pied Pipers". ---We were the next youngest of the Four-----Ha!! For those of you in the South who saw The Show I think you'll agree it was a Fun Show.

We work so much alone, as do the other groups, that we forget how much Fun it can be to work together. We had a ball on the Bus, for many reasons, - the Bar - the fact it sleeps 8 and last but not least the Driver. The bus was a customized Trailways Type. It made the trip much more relaxed. Murph, our driver, is one of a kind. A great guy and a great driver. He has driven people like - Olivia Newton John, Dolly Parton (would like to do that myself), Beach Boys and lots more. He has a million Road Stories needless to say.

Our Promoter, and Leader, was a great guy name, Mike Dowling, with Limelight Productions, in Chicago. He managed to get us all on the Bus and to each Concert without losing anyone.

As you all know I have been A Lead Singer for a long time, so I feel qualified to say this, ----Lynn Robert's, with the Pied Pipers, is one of the greatest I've ever heard. She knocked all of us out, every single night.

We will do the same tour in February in Florida only, so if you're in the Sunshine State, ya'll come see us.

One more thing ----we have our new Country Squire Motor Home and will be out from March 6 - May 15 doing more Community Concerts in about 20 States. So if you see a Country Squire with a trailer with "The Four Freshmen" on the side, either honk twice and wave or get on the old "CB: on Channel 19 and break for "The Hanging Judge," that's me.

Bob