

Here We Come... (continued from page 3)

Through trial and error, Don innovated a new way of stringing his guitar which gave it a rich, full-bodied sound. This also became part of the signature sound that caused listeners to take notice.

While Don was a powerful soloist and chose his own songs to sing, he was also the primary music influencer for the group. Most of his free time was spent listening to the popular songs and he clearly had a knack for picking crowd pleasers. He suggested the songs they should learn - but all four members had to agree, or they would not do the song.

Once they had decided to learn a song, they would each begin choosing their own notes. There were no charts for their harmonies. None of the popular vocal groups of their time were singing the chords the Freshmen had in mind. They built their own arrangements and figured out the instrumentation through collaboration and experimentation. Many of those early songs never had written arrangements, they were perfected in dressing rooms and confirmed on stage.

Besides rehearsing and learning new songs, there was a lot to do when they weren't performing. Ross planned the shows, putting together the order of songs, creating variety in each performance and timing it to meet the required set length. He would write a list and tape it to his drumhead to refer to, calling out the songs for the others. Ross was also the emcee of the shows and over time, he and Bob worked up short 'comedy bits' to fill in between songs. Hal worked with the booking agents to find and schedule gigs and Bob dealt with travel arrangements. Of course, in those early days, most of the travel was driving in four cars from town to town with a map on the lap.

By 1951, the group had really gained momentum. They had even made some records and disc jockeys were beginning to play their songs. The number of gigs increased, which was great, but that meant more traveling from town to town. By then, all the guys had wives and small children traveling on the road with them. It was not an easy life.

Hal, who had been so anxious to set out on the road, decided he was not happy traveling so much and wanted to raise his family in one place. This was a

big deal! Their whole sound was based on four parts. They began to search for someone who could fill the part. As Hal made plans to leave, they were lucky to find a very talented singer/musician, Ken Errair, and they began teaching him the songs. They recorded many of their songs with Hal singing, standing close to the recorder and the others standing back a bit, so that Ken could hear his part easily. This technique seemed to work... Ken had never sung in a vocal group before, but he took to it with aplomb. In June of 1953, Hal stepped out and Ken stepped in. That was the end of the original group.



**This is Group Two (1953-1956):
Ken Errair, Don Barbour,
Ross Barbour and Bob Flanigan.**

Although they didn't realize it at the time, they had just become what would later be called, "Group Two". There have been over twenty different configurations of the group. Each time a new member has joined, he has brought his own set of talents and specialties to the performances. [Even though Hal recorded the first few songs with the group, his picture is not on any of the album covers. You can hear his solo voice in the early recording, Now You Know.]

Those first few years were chock-full of triumphs and tribulations. Little did they know they were laying the groundwork for musical history. Many popular vocal groups have been influenced by their vocal sound and as the fifties turned into the sixties, most of the popular singing groups who followed, such as The Beach Boys and The Beatles, played their own instruments while singing. This is something the Four Freshmen helped to usher into the modern style of performance.

The Four Freshmen have performed to faithful audiences for over seventy years, and have made

fans and friends all over the world. Today, they continue to travel and perform, staying true to the sound and the dream that began in 1948, playing their own instruments and singing songs from the Great American Songbook.

The Four Freshmen Society keeps its members informed about upcoming events and engagements with their website and Newsletter. They also organize an annual event for fans to gather and hear the group perform. These events, which are held in different locations each year, are always a wonderful experience for all who attend.

The Four Freshmen Music Foundation is dedicated to preserving their music and making the arrangements available to educators and to young people who are interested in learning this special sound. The Music Foundation is working with Butler University and Bowling Green State University to establish archives of Four Freshmen charts, recordings and memorabilia for preservation and viewing. The Four Freshmen Music Foundation will continue to work to keep this sound alive by bringing the music of the Four Freshmen into the lives of young singers for years to come.