

The Four Freshmen and the Gillespie's

By Elaine & Gary Gillespie, M.D.

I was introduced to the Freshmen, Group #3, circa 1960 by a high school friend who later was selected by the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club, and honored to sing with the Friars, a select group from the Glee Club which added some humor to their a capella vocals. My background was in instrumental music, and I was a member of the University of Michigan Marching Band. We had the good fortune to hear Don and Ross Barbour; their cousin, Bob Flanigan; and Ken Albers who I felt, as a relatively less-talented trumpet player myself, was underrated in his abilities. The group performed in Hill Auditorium on campus. Built in 1923, it still maintains ideal acoustics, and was a perfect venue for #3. I later acquired a composite of their Capitol label recordings.

My wife and I, over the years, have seen one group of the Four Freshmen in Elkhart, IN at that city's Jazz Festival, as well as more recent iterations in various places in Michigan, and have never been disappointed in the quality of the well-preserved 'Freshmen Sound', which helps explain its 78 years of success. However, #3 is my sentimental favorite, and Ross Barbour's chronicle, *And Now You Know*, preserves the joys and challenges of the early years of a group which has successfully transcended Rock and Roll, a British Invasion, Rap and Hip-Hop....

We have a number of memories associated with the 1960 Four Freshmen concert, as well as the present realization of how quickly time passes: something I was advised of by one of my patients shortly after beginning medical practice in 1976 while in my 30s.

It was a wonderful and rewarding 25 years and, after retirement, I pulled my trumpet out of 'mothballs' and played with a number of local groups for 15 years, including a brass quintet. However, we could only lay claim to playing an occasional chart of the Canadian Brass, while not quite matching their level of finesse and musicianship!

Making music may be even more satisfying than listening.

A New Generation of Freshmen Fan

By Andrew Rivera ("GoDreamerGoVideos" on YouTube)

Hello everyone — my name is Andrew, and at 34 going on 35, I may be one of the younger members of the Four Freshmen Society.

I first discovered the Freshmen years ago through the Beach Boys. In my twenties, I learned that songs like *Graduation Day* and *Their Hearts Were Full of Spring* were originally by The Four Freshmen — not the Beach Boys — and I immediately bought their Capitol Collector Series album. I listened to it casually for years, always struck by how timeless the music felt. But it wasn't until recently, after hearing the Bean Tones perform their wonderful Freshmen covers, that I revisited that collection — and that's when everything truly clicked. What had once been casual appreciation turned into a deep interest in their sound, history, and artistry.

Music has always been a big part of my life. I grew up in a musical family — my father had a deep love of vocal harmonies, which definitely rubbed off on me. I sang in church choirs as a kid and again in college, where I also took voice lessons and studied a bit of opera and musical theatre. Later on, I sang in a few pop-rock bands, but no matter what kind of music I performed, I always gravitated toward harmonies. They've always felt like the heart of the song to me.

After years of singing simpler music, I found myself craving something richer and more challenging. That's when The Four Freshmen came back into the picture. I was drawn not only to their sound, but to the idea of The Four Freshmen as an institution — a group that has kept evolving for decades while still maintaining the same musical identity.

Soon I was researching all of the different lineups, studying who sang which parts, and listening for what made each group unique. I've spent more hours than I'd like to admit scouring YouTube for old concert footage (maybe we've even crossed paths in the comments — I go by "GoDreamerGoVideos" there). I've also started recording myself singing all four parts to a few songs just for fun — mostly to better understand how those harmonies fit together. Coming from a church and pop background, it's been a whole new learning experience to tackle jazz chords, but an incredibly rewarding one.

On top of the Bean Tones, I was also inspired by the International Four Freshmen led by Angelo Giambra. Angelo was kind enough to share his transcription of *Lil' Darlin'* with me — and I've been hooked ever since. Finding accurate charts for some of the lesser-known songs can be tricky, but that's part of the adventure.

Because I'm on the younger side, I don't have many people around me who know the Freshmen's music, so when I discovered the Four Freshmen Society, I joined right away. I posted on the forums soon after joining and was blown away by the warm welcome — so thank you to everyone who reached out with kind words and stories. It's clear that this community carries just as much harmony as the music itself.

I'm eager to keep learning more — about the music, the history, and the incredible people who have kept The Freshmen legacy alive all these years. If anyone has interesting stories, trivia, or memories to share, please don't hesitate to reach out. I was out of the country during the Tennessee event this year, but I hope to meet many of you at the next one.

Until then, I'll keep listening, learning, and singing along — one chord at a time.