

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Article by Armand Demille

What’s it like to attend a Four Freshmen convention for the first time? I attended the convention the weekend of March 7th in Nashville, Tennessee and found out.

I don’t know if the conventions are always held at such “high end” locations as the Nashville Airport Hilton, but the accommodations were first class - beautiful rooms, plus a delicious variety of food at the daily luncheon buffets.

The first event was a “Fresh Talk” Q&A with the members of the band, and a few offspring of previous members. A lot of the questions were focused on the newest member of the band, Chris Peters, including questions about how he came to be hired, and how he prepared for his complex new role as lead singer and bass player, and questions about his musical background. Another interesting question had to do with what the members do when they’re not touring and performing. Bob Ferreira, the drummer, who’s been with the band the longest, lent an air of gravitas to the conversation, and was able to provide some historical perspective to answering some of the questions. An interesting question was posed about other bands who have acknowledged being influenced by The Four Freshmen, and whether the band had considered including songs by some of those groups, like The Beach Boys and The Four Seasons, in their repertoire. The answer was that the Freshmen are dedicated to preserving the history and heritage of the band, and that singing songs by other “copiers” would lead to them being perceived as a “variety band” or a “tribute band”, and they prefer to be true to the tradition of their historical predecessors.

The weekend included two performances by the group, one Friday night and one Saturday, both totally different. As a new listener, many of the songs were unfamiliar

to me, but I recognized such classics as *Graduation Day*, *Stardust* and *Candy*. There is no backing band - the four singers each play an instrument; Chris Peters on bass, Tommy Boynton on guitar, Bob Ferreira on drums, and Jake Baldwin on trumpet and flugelhorn. The vocal harmonies were rich and complex, and the instrumental performances were masterful. Each song was a mini-masterpiece. About half way through the show, Bob came out from behind his drums, and the four of them gathered around a couple of mics and sang together. An interesting aspect of that part of the show was that Bob used brushes to play rhythms on a metal music stand. It was a great sound, and perfectly suited to the ballads they sang in that part of the show.

I mentioned earlier that as a new listener, I was unfamiliar with many of the tunes that make up The Four Freshmen repertoire, but that certainly wasn’t the case with the group that gathered Saturday afternoon for a “jam session” and singalong. It was reminiscent of a church congregation singing familiar songs from a traditional hymnal. They sang enthusiastically and confidently, as if the songs were as familiar to them as *Happy Birthday*. The guest musicians performed some instrumental numbers, and there were several guest singers, including a “surprise” appearance by former member Ryan Howe.

What struck me most during the whole weekend was the “family vibe” of everyone there, with both the band members and the attendees. Everyone I spoke to was friendly and pleasant, everyone was polite, and most had interesting stories to tell of previous conventions and performances, and greeted each other with warm embraces like old friends. To sum up, you won’t find a more welcoming, fun-loving group of music lovers than Four Freshmen fans!

