

A GRAND LOVE AFFAIR!

by Wayne Corey (FFS-Wisconsin)

He turned his eyes toward his companion as Bob Ferreira sang about being the best of lovers and the best of friends. It was a brief moment during *How Do You Keep the Music Playing?* Earlier in the show she had affectionately reached out her hand to the man. Another brief moment. Were they a middle-aged couple reliving their youth? Or perhaps new love discovering itself? Whichever, they were just two of over 600 people who filled the Grand Opera House in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to carry on a love affair with the Four Freshmen.

The Freshmen and Oshkosh go back a lot of years, a lot of audiences and, yes, a lot of Freshmen. On this May evening an audience was falling in love again with the Freshmen as they discovered Group #22. This audience departed only after a standing ovation, shaking hands with, buying CDs from and raving about Brian Eichenberger, Curtis Calderon, Vince Johnson and Bob Ferreira. And make no mistake, to that audience and every audience who hears them, these guys are the Four Freshmen. Here. Today. Now. Hip. Contemporary. And easy to love!

When Brian sings *If I Only Had a Brain* we aren't in Kansas anymore, Toto. Well, we aren't in 1958 anymore, either. We are in the 21st Century and so are today's thoroughly modern Freshmen!

The set list this night hadn't changed much in the four months since your reviewer had last heard the group. In fact, the guys were five songs into the first set before surprising hard core fans with a song recently returned to the book, a stunning rendition of *You've Got Me Crying Again* from *Four Freshmen & 5 Saxes*. The arrangement offers breathtaking harmonies and the Freshmen nailed it.

The second set brought a new arrangement and an old technique. Brian's arrangement of *You've Changed* was a throwback to the long ago days of monophonic recording as the group gathered around just one microphone. They followed with *My One and Only Love*, another Brian chart that has been in the book for some time. Both arrangements are outstanding and the harmonies are great. The one mike scheme was novel, but probably unnecessary in Oshkosh. The Grand's sound board operator was doing a superb job mixing the four microphones. Moving to one mike seemed to diminish the volume and make it impossible to mix the harmonies to 2004 standards.

September Song has a marvelous new Vince Johnson arrangement. Sure, we heard the Freshmen sing a few bars on *Road Show* with the Kenton band and June Christy. But Vince's chart is all Freshmen all the time and it is a keeper. This beautiful Kurt Weill classic now has the beautiful Freshmen arrangement it has deserved for decades. As with several other newer FF arrangements, this one seems destined to be on the next CD.

The group is still opening with the difficult *Day In, Day Out* and following with *You Stepped Out Of A Dream*, *Invitation* and Greg

Stegeman's hot arrangement of *Young and Foolish*, the song that kicks off the *Live in Holland* CD. The second set still opens with *Route 66* and follows with *Poinciana*.

Every Time We Say Goodbye continues to close the first set while both the January and May shows wrapped with *Day By Day*, *It's A Blue World*, Bob's solo on *How Do You Keep the Music Playing* and *After You've Gone* taken at breakneck speed. Responding to a rousing standing ovation, the Freshmen encored with *Their Hearts Were Full of Spring* and left to one more roar from the crowd.

There were some fun moments during the show. Seeing my ASK ME ABOUT THE FOUR FRESHMEN topper as I headed for the lobby at intermission, the folks seated next to me pressed a \$20 bill in my hand and begged me to bring them back a CD. The delivery boy delivered the goods. Bob Ferreira blew the opening to *September Song* and the group started over after Bob quipped that he thought they were doing the other *September Song*. Curtis sang his first (to these ears) vocal solo in that tasty song "*You've Changed*."

John Bangs, the Bard of Oshkosh, lamented after the show that the Freshmen still have no keyboards. Some Fresh News issue, if our editor allows, I will pursue this point and invite Mr. Bangs to deliver his always-wise assessment to the masses reading this publication. Ah, but not this time.

A summary: Group #22 is tremendously comfortable together. They like each other. They rehearse. They are remarkable musicians. They add new songs to the book. They work hard. They sing yesterday's songs super and they arrange and sing new material even better. They deserve our never-ending support.

These guys are the Four Freshmen. It says so on my concert ticket. We enjoy a grand love affair with the Four Freshmen. But if Group #22 was named *Four Guys from Minnesota, California, Washington and Texas* they would still be a great, great musical act in 2004. And we would still love the music they are giving us. To quote, as I always do, Ira Gershwin: Who could ask for anything more?



(Photo: Dale Bernstein, FFS WI)