

JAZZ APPRECIATION MONTH: A FRESH LOOK!

by Wayne Corey, FFS-Wisconsin

Could a couple of white-haired guys with a strong musical bias draw anyone to a Fresh discussion on a sunny Sunday afternoon? The answer, somewhat to our surprise, was yes, as Mike McCoy (FFS Wisconsin rep) and your author kicked off Jazz Appreciation Month in Madison with a presentation at the downtown headquarters branch of the Madison Public Library. 20 people showed up for the talk and, to our surprise and delight, they all stayed to hear and learn about The Four Freshmen and to hear three local players make music after our hour-long presentation.

The Madison Jazz Society does a fine job of promoting all styles of jazz and they jumped on the opportunity to sponsor public discussions and demonstrations during April, Jazz Appreciation Month. That led Mike and me, with a distinguished supporting cast, to kick off the series with our own version of "Fresh Talk." In truth, Mike and I were conduits for the knowledge and talent of others. Bob Jackson, with consultation from Ross Barbour, put together the fine paper on the uniqueness of the Four Freshmen from which we spoke and played musical examples. Each audience member was given a copy of Bob's paper and Professor Jackson's scholarly explanations were exceeded only by the music he was explaining.

To illustrate the influence of the Frosh, Mike opened our presentation by inviting audience guesses on who was singing *Happy Birthday, Four Freshmen*. It was Brian Wilson, Beach Boy extraordinaire, who took FF chord structures to rock & roll. The presentation included Stan Kenton discussing his discovery of the Freshmen and the Kenton band doing *We'll Be Together Again* to illustrate a point made in Bob Jackson's paper (and long understood by Freshmen fans) that the original Freshmen wanted to sound like the trombone section of the Kenton band.

Other music used to illustrate the Freshmen sound included *It's A Blue World*, *In This Whole Wide World*, *Day In-Day Out* and *Poinciana*. We made the jump from the early years to 2005 in very predictable fashion. FF Group #3 sang their opening bars of *September Song* from 1959's Road Show and we segued into Vince Johnson's chart of the entire song. Vince, as you know, completed the arrangement 45 years after the first eight bars were sung with Kenton and June Christy. *September Song* from **In Session** led us to *That Old Feeling* and *If I Had You* from the current FF CD. The audience agreed that today's Freshmen retain that classic FF concept and sound while bringing a hip contemporary approach to the music that remains, yes, still Fresh! To wrap it up, we moved the music back to 1963 and Group #4 with Ross classic closer, *And So It's Over*.

What was the most difficult part of putting the presentation together? Picking the songs to use! During numerous conversations prior to our presentation, both of us presented lists of FF tracks that just HAD to be used in any serious effort to explain the Freshmen. Regrettably, each of us wanted four hours of our own favorite FF songs while we were allotted one hour for the entire presentation. Mike wisely put **In Session** on

the CD player prior to our start so listeners could hear some more of the new recordings. Bill Comstock's *Early Autumn* and Brian Eichenberger's *My One & Only Love* and *Skylark* wowed the crowd. To Mike's chagrin, the noted Leroy Duck chart on *Paper Doll* didn't make the cut.

Mike & I learned from this experience that devoted jazz fans will turn out to hear other devoted jazz fans explain an aspect of the music. Thanks to Bob Jackson, Ross Barbour, several generations of Freshmen, the Madison Jazz Society and the Madison Public Library we were able to pull it off. If you'd like more information on how it all fit together, contact us through the FFS-Wisconsin website -

www.madison.com/communities/4fresh

You will also find Bob Jackson's excellent paper posted there.



Read All About It! **Jazz Times (May 2005): A Tasty Review** by Christopher Loudon

The FF New Release: **IN SESSION**

While breezing through **In Session** (Four Freshmen), the first original Four Freshmen disc in more than a decade, keep the emphasis fully on "fresh." Since the group's inception in 1948 there have been no fewer than 23 personnel changes, and none of the current Freshmen - lead singer Brian Eichenberger plus Curtis Calderon, Vince Johnson and Bob Ferreira - overlapped with any of the original foursome (Ferreira, the longest standing of the extant crew, replaced founding member Bob Flanigan in 1992). *Fresh* also pertains to the 11 standards covered here, none of which have previously been recorded by any configuration of Freshmen. So, the voices are new, as are the songs. But the sound - that trademark mix of tight harmonies, keen jazz instincts and tremendous joviality - is here in spades, making this the best, brightest and most satisfying Freshmen release since the group's sublime 1972 homecoming (when Flanigan and Ross Barbour were both still onboard) captured on *Live at Butler University*.