



Fresh News

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Ross Barbour / Bob Flanigan

by Tim Hauser (an excerpt from Jazz Times, March 2012)

The passing of Ross Barbour this past August was duly noted and, I must say, it carried a bit of a sting. The end of an era always carries that bite of reality that causes one to pause and reflect. Ross was the last surviving member of the Four Freshmen, and his passing fell so quickly after his partner Bob Flanigan, who passed in May. Bob was the signature voice of the Four Freshmen, and Ross was the group's founder. My first introduction to one of my favorite vocal groups occurred in 1955, when WNEW played their single *Day by Day*. The musical bar was much higher in those days, so they were not looked upon

up as a jazz group, but rather a pop group. After all, *Day by Day* was a hit single. What was it about the Four Freshmen that so captivated me back when I was 13? I didn't know much about vocal group history, but certainly had enjoyed the big band groups like the Pied Pipers and the Merry Macs. I also liked the Mills Brothers and the Four Aces. But the Four Freshmen were different. They were, for want of a better term, modern. I can't find any other way to describe that sound. I purchased "Day by Day" at my local record store and played that 45 over and over. The flip side was *How Can I Tell Her*: It was as beautiful as the A-side, and that cut too got its grooves worn. That sound really got to me—the way those voices moved around inside the harmony was like nothing I had ever heard.

To bring things full circle, Vince Johnson, of the current Four Freshmen incarnation, is a friend of mine, and we go to ball games together. Our respective ladies are friends, so we hang quite a bit. The Four Freshmen of today are as good as the band during the Ken Albers days. Yes, it was duly noted that Ross Barbour passed, as the last original member. But the good news is the Four Freshmen are still making great music. Go check them out, say hello to Vince, and give him my regards. They are still quite "modern."



Tim Hauser of "Manhattan Transfer" attended the Four Freshmen concert in McCallum Theatre in Palm Desert, CA, March 26, 2012.

Right: The boys sign autographs at the McCallum

