

GRANDEST MUSIC AT GRAND CONVENTION IN GRAND RAPIDS

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The 2004 annual FFS convention/reunion is now history, and from beginning to end it was obvious that our hosts, Jack and Mary Morrison and their committee had worked very hard to make sure that everything flowed smoothly the entire weekend. My tour of duty at the registration table proved to be the easiest of the many conventions I have worked - no problems or surprises.

The musical entertainment was sensational all three nights. Actually, the Thursday night "Jam Session" was the best we've seen and heard in the past twelve years! The very versatile Tom Hagen Trio opened the evening with a nice blend of instrumental and vocal stylings. Tom Hagen on Keyboard, petite Cherie Lynn Hagen on drums and vocals, and Rick Reuther on guitar and vocals. When it came time for the "Jam Session," the trio continued to fill in and support Doc Livingston on clarinet and Yas Ichiura on valve trombone. Soon Ross Barbour was encouraged to take over on drums, and Curtis Calderon came up to try out his new flugelhorn followed by Vince Johnson with his trombone. Dan McMillion blew his stratospheric trumpet and Bruce from WI also joined in with his trumpet. Then Curtis took over the guitar and the group of musicians on stage just kept playing MORE great jazz. It was so amazing to see how these individual music-makers could mesh together and produce that wonderful sound. Vince whistled his heart out and played his BIG acoustic bass - a real treat to say the least. (We were in the lobby of the hotel on Wed. night when the Freshmen arrived, carting in their gear, and the size of Vince's bass case was astonishing! We were thrilled that he had brought it to the convention.) Former Freshmen, Ray Brown, kept things moving and grooving for a very lively evening of music.

Friday night the very talented Keller-Kocher Quartet from Ann Arbor, MI, was the opening act. These guys were FANTASTIC and graced our ears with some top notch jazz that included several arrangements by the recently deceased bass player, Ray Brown. The group featured a really good acoustic bass player (Keller), and an equally accomplished vibes musician (Kocher.) It was so interesting to be close enough to watch those two instruments being played so well. (Paul Keller remarked from the stage that Jack Morrison had been his baseball coach when he was young!)

When the Four Freshmen came on, we were primed for a super performance by OUR favorite quartet. Of course, they delivered the goods which included lots of new arrangements of beautiful tunes like "Skylark." They were also terribly humorous with their stage banter, resulting in much laughter throughout the evening. They did, indeed, "leave em laughing." We appreciate their efforts to keep introducing new arrangements all the time, and Vince's acoustic bass provided a wonderful mellow tone to the performance of the new additions to the repertoire.

On Saturday night we were served a delicious dinner in an elegant setting in preparation for the best dessert of all - the icing on the cake - Sooooo Sweet - a nice, long, pure Freshmen show. The four guys were so handsome in their suits with a bright red carnation on their lapels. We listened attentively, laughed hilariously at their antics and swooned with their music. They filled the room with many of the "old chestnuts," as Ross calls them, and delighted us with more new tunes and arrangements than we ever imagined. Bob's new solo "How Do You Keep The Music Playing" was so beautiful - don't think I've ever heard him sing with more emotion. The harmony is superb and instrumental capabilities of these four young men is reaching new heights. Curtis displayed such expertise on the trumpet and flugelhorn, and Vince showed us just how accomplished he truly is on that huge bass. Thank goodness he brought it to us in Grand Rapids, MI, since we know he can't take it on the road very often. And Brain was, as always, superb at everything. Is there anything that guy can't play? All too soon, we were hearing the sad but beautiful "We'll Be Together Again" signaling the end of another richly satisfying performance by the most talented quartet around. What a GRAND convention in every way.

