

## **REMEMBERING MIKE BEISNER**

**By Greg Stegeman**

If it weren't for Mike Beisner, I might not have had a career with The Four Freshmen. He was the one who suggested me to replace him to Bob Flanigan when Mike got the call to be the musical director for the ill-fated Joan Lunden talk show "EveryDay" in 1989. That's when I began to realize the enormity of his talents and contributions. He had stratospheric lead trumpet chops, formidable flugelhorn jazz chops, overwhelming keyboard facility, big band and vocal arranging skills, and could sing any of the harmony parts. Other than that, he wasn't a tough act to follow. It took me more than a year to rise out of his shadow and make my own "voice" heard. Some of you may know that Mike had his own jazz club in his hometown of Lawrence, Kansas while still in his 20's. His trio was the house band that brought in The Four Freshmen for an engagement which led to his eventual singing with them. What is not common knowledge, however, are the many fine vocal charts he wrote for the one studio recording I did with him in '93, "Voices in Standards": "Come Fly With Me", "Young at Heart", "All the Way", "All or Nothing at All", "How Insensitive" (his best, I think), "Nice and Easy", and "Put Your Dreams Away" are all Mike's arrangements. When we made the significant changes after Bob retired in '92, Mike wrote a solid vocal and horn score on Harry Connick Jr.'s "Recipe For Love" that was only released as a demo cassette. "Just Friends" was another great Beisner chart that featured a killer be-bop line for trumpet and alto sax (Autie) that, unfortunately, never got recorded.

Mike and I worked together for five years and it was he with Bob Flanigan that made the relatively smooth transition from the last original member unit to the (unfortunately titled) "ghost" group. Mike really championed me with my new role as lead singer that gave me the confidence to do something that was impossible, replace a legendary performer that owned that part for the first 44 years! On the occasions where Mike and I traveled in vans together on the road, we would crack each other up---him, with dead-on impersonations of Gerald Ford and Kirk Douglas, and me with Jonathan Winters routines. There wasn't anything Mike couldn't do, musically or otherwise and his contribution to the Freshmen story is huge. All my condolences to his family, friends, and fans.

### **FF MICHAEL LEE BEISNER**

**4/1/55 - 7/6/08**

Mike Beisner (53), one of the most exciting members of The Four Freshmen Legacy, died of natural causes Sunday, July 6 in Las Vegas. Mike had a history of diabetes and also experienced a heart attack and stroke later in life.

He and wife Connie had three children, two sons, Matthew and Corbin and a daughter Lauren. Services were held at the Griffith United Methodist Church (LV) Thursday, July 10, followed by a reception and a series of musical and presentations by his many jazz friends. Freshmen alumni also participated and close friend Rod Henley mentioned the FF Society and the many contacts Mike had made with the members over his 13-years.

He was also married to recent wife Terry James and Mike had registered to attend the 60th FF anniversary in Indianapolis.

Mike first joined the Freshmen in 1982 (Group #8), replacing the late Ken Albers. He stayed with the group for the next seven years through August, 1989. He returned to the FF line-up in 1990 (Group #15), subbing for Bob Flanigan, who was recovering from a heart attack on the road. Mike's final years with the Four Freshmen were 1991-1992 (Groups #17 & #18) with his stage presence and high register trumpet and flugelhorn driving the sound.

A Stan Kenton Ork alumnus, he remained musically active in Vegas after leaving the line-up. For the past eight years Mike worked with various Geotechnical Engineering firms, designing and managing multiple test labs. He recently worked with close friends at Angle Engineering, still with time to perform with leading players in the music business.

Was there a Beisner favorite? Recall his "Sophisticated Suite" re Duke Ellington on the FF Fresh CD (1986). In Vegas his friends were lifelong musicians of note in and out of the jazz world. . .

Mike Beisner was a star on my stage!

Dick Baldwin