

# 'Blue Moon' Convention

Mike McCoy, FFS - Wisconsin, 9-25-09

The annual gathering of Four Freshmen alumni and fans Aug 20-22 already is being remembered in Society lore as the "'Blue Moon' Convention."

It earned that nickname at the sold-out Saturday dinner show on the convention's last night at the suburban Crowne Plaza Ravinia hotel on Atlanta's northeast side. The Four Freshmen show was nearing its end when Freshmen bass singer Bob Ferreira announced the Freshmen had a song request from someone in the audience.

Bob said Nancy Whitmire, wife of Society Treasurer James Whitmire, had asked the Freshmen earlier in the week if they would sing "Blue Moon."

Perhaps "Blue World" was intended? Regardless, to the surprise of many in the audience because it's never been a Freshmen song, Bob said they would do just that.

With Curtis, Vince and Brian doing backup vocals and instrumentation, Bob took the vocal lead on "Blue Moon" in a 1960s- and decidedly non-Freshmen style -- one perhaps at least somewhat reminiscent of the 1961 version which was a big hit for the doo-wop Marcells..

After just a few bars, Curtis was heard loudly lamenting, "I can't believe we're doing this!" Many in the chuckling audience surely understood that sentiment.

The audience laughter quickly began to build as Curtis took control of the melody with his trumpet and left Bob and the other Freshmen in his wake. The longer Curtis played, the greater the laughter until any pretense of an ensemble performance disappeared. "Blue Moon" had turned into a brief Curtis showcase before Curtis apparently realized it was the moment the music should die.

"That answers the question whether we do 'Blue Moon'," Brian said after a brief moment of silence. Slight pause. "No."

The laughter and sustained applause from the 400-plus present may have been for the good-humored Freshmen effort -- or more likely, for the unexpected comedy that came with it.

Moving on (so we thought), the Freshmen brought four Freshmen alumni, Ray Brown, Rod Henley, Ross Barbour, and Bob Flanigan to the stage for a rousing show-closing number by the now-"Eight Freshmen" singing "Day by Day."

Within just a few bars, however, Curtis took control on trumpet with a brief jazzy "Blue Moon" riff that meshed exactly right with "Day by Day," provoking another round of audience laughter and at that moment insuring the three-day event would be recalled as the "Blue Moon Convention."

Somehow the assembled Freshmen finished "Day by Day." It was a special treat as Bob had told fans earlier in the convention he no longer sings. With that in mind, Bob was told as he was invited to the stage to join the others that he could simply mouth the words if he wished. Fortunately for the fans present, he not only sang but his distinctive voice that helped make the unique Freshmen sound clearly could be heard by those present.

Flanigan's appearance on stage was his second of the evening, the first being for the presentation of a birthday cake by Miss Georgia USA as Saturday was Bob's 83rd. He also was given a large quilt which featured as its pattern color photos of various configurations of the Freshmen and selected album covers from their 60-plus years.

It was part of the pre-show dinner program which had included the transfer of the leadership of the Four Freshmen Society from Dick Baldwin to Mel Meyers. Dick was honored with a special plaque commemorating his service and Mel delivered a short acceptance speech.

## A Mid-Show Change

For the Saturday show, the Freshmen had planned to do their first-half performance with their standard multi-mike setup, then move to one mike for the second half, recalling the earlier years of Freshmen amplification. They started the second half with "Poinciana" but abandoned their plan after that number because of the loud music coming from a wedding party in an adjacent ballroom.

They returned to the one mike arrangement later in the program when the wedding party took a musical break and were able to finish the show following their original plan.

The Freshmen were called back for two encores by an audience unwilling for the evening and the convention to end. "We'll Be Together Again" was the first encore, while the second featured both "After You" and Ross Barbour's composition the Freshmen used for many years to close shows, "And So It's Over." (And so it was until we gather the same weekend again in 2010 at Annapolis, Maryland.)

Among the many tunes offered during the evening were several revivals. The list included "Graduation Day," "Laura," "Little Girl Blue," "Guilty," "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," and "Give Me the Simple Life."

## 'Fresh Talk' allows for recollections

Earlier Saturday, the traditional "Fresh Talk," well attended as usual, was held for fans, with all current and past Four Freshmen alumni present in Atlanta serving as a panel taking questions from the audience. .

Some responses:

Bob Flanigan said of Friday night's Four Freshmen performance:

"I was in awe as much as you (the fans) were."

Asked about his memories of the late '50s era "Roadshow" tour, Bob said "Working with the Stan Kenton band was the ultimate." (The mention of Kenton was timely as the following Tuesday was the 30th anniversary of his death.)

Asked about his earliest musical days, Bob said he started on harmonica as a child, then learned guitar. He had his first instruction in chords from listening to the "Grand Ol' Opry" radio broadcasts