

FIVE TROMBONES REVISITED

The Freshmen had been working on Four Freshmen and Five Trombone charts for recording at September's West Coast Jazz Party. Those performances may comprise the next FF Group 22 CD. Lucky convention attendees got to hear them first.

Voices and Brass, recorded by Group 3 with arranger/conductor Pete Rugolo in 1959, could have been called The Four Freshmen and a Gang of Trombones. As many as nine 'bones played on some tracks. Five played on the classic track Candy and that chart kicked off the exciting Five Trombones segment. The GPC trombone section, augmented by a fifth player, sounded a tad tentative at the start but that didn't last long.

Our Love Is Here to Stay made 400 people remember just how thrilling the Four Freshmen sound can be. Here were the four voices across five notes in the chord. Here were the second and third voices moving through the chord, the first and fourth voices anchoring at each end and the trombone choir providing rock solid backing. It was an absolutely stunning take on a chart that sounded utterly, well, fresh, even though we'd all heard it hundreds of times in our lives. Whew!

The Freshmen and trombones swung through Somebody Loves Me and You Made Me Love You with a great sound mix allowing us to hear bass and piano driving the rhythm section. By the time the guys got to the famous break before the bridge, "Doo Wah, Doo Wah, Pete Rugolo" it was obvious to every listener that these arrangements sound as contemporary today as they did when we fell in love with Four Freshmen and Five Trombones.

The entire band came back for Route 66, the classic Freshmen favorite that also first showed up on Voices and Brass. The Freshmen were cookin', the band was smokin' and the whole gang rocked down that familiar highway. Bobby Troup was smiling somewhere.

From the start of the show it was apparent the Freshmen were pumped. It was also obvious that an undeclared cutting contest was going on among the trumpet players on stage. Band leader Greg McLean was good as were members of his trumpet section but the knowing smiles from Bob, Vince and Brian left no doubt that they knew what was happening. Building contractors should have been standing by because Curtis Calderon blew the roof off the ballroom of the Crowne Plaza at Ravinia that night.

Veteran sound mix master Erich Bucholtz again had the music going great. Legendary retired FF member and arranger Greg Stegeman painstakingly transcribed the original Five Trombones charts and the convention audience came prepared to love every minute of it. When the night was over a lot of fans who have heard a lot of Four Freshmen concerts over a lot of years were of like mind: this night just might have been the greatest FF concert any of us had ever heard.

Wayne Corey, FFS Wisconsin

Friday's Big Noise from Ravinia

It was a blast from the past!

It was a flight to the future!

It was Friday night at the "Blue Moon" convention in Atlanta when the Four Freshmen returned to those thrilling Kenton band Road Show days and then moved us forward with only a hint of nostalgia as they reintroduced the Four Freshmen and Five Trombones.

The Freshmen used the Road Show opener, Day In - Day Out, backed by the excellent 17 piece GPC Jazz Ensemble. The Freshmen did it with the Kenton band nearly 50 years ago and that recording still produces a thrill, swinging harder than any other live track by any Freshmen group. Group 22's vocal harmonies were impeccable this night. They took the song at a slightly slower pace than the original recording and the GPC band isn't as crisp as the Kenton band but, then, neither is anyone else. Michael Beisner once told me Day in - Day Out is one of the toughest of all FF charts. Group 22 made it look easy.

Poinciana had a somewhat quicker tempo than either the original recording or other live recordings of the song by FF groups, including Group 22, through the years. From the opening attack, it was obvious that the guys and the band were going to absolutely nail the chart. A superb sound mix added to the pleasure.

And then came a surprise. If I Had You was an obscure ballad, best known by Frank Sinatra's 1947 recording, when the Freshmen put it on their In Session CD. On the CD the chart became an absolute cooker. In concert, however, the guys have taken it back to its ballad days. It's OK but a disappointment to fans who love the uptempo Bourbon Street meets Beale Street version on In Session. But that Friday night we were introduced to yet a third FF incarnation of If I Had You. The new Big Band chart from Patrick Murray proves "it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing!"

A super walking bass line propelled the music forward from the start. The chart has hot brass and swinging saxes. Brian Eichenberger's vocal solo put back some of that Memphis grit. Bob Ferrera said it was only the second time the guys have done the new chart live. It showed in a couple of somewhat sloppy vocal attacks but again the harmonies were great. Patrick Murray, a musician from Los Angeles by way of Austin, Texas and the Manhattan School of Music, is a most welcome addition to the Four Freshmen family of great arrangers! Bob summed it up best: "Great chart!"

Speaking of great arrangers and arrangements, Greg's Stegeman's Walking My Baby Back Home came next. Wikipedia lists 75 artists who have recorded this song since 1930, with Nat Cole and Johnnie Ray having notable hit versions in 1952. The Freshmen are the ONLY vocal group to record it. That distinction may be permanent because it would be tough to top this chart.

The intricate vocal harmonies of Fools Rush In amaze as much today as they did almost 50 years ago when Ken Albers wrote the chart. The song sounded marvelous on The Freshmen Year in 1960 and sounds super when Group 22 does it self-contained today. The Big Band accompaniment adds a special touch, perhaps because the song started as a Big Band hit for both Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. Miller had Ray Eberle's vocal. Dorsey featured a skinny guy from Hoboken named

Sinatra. The GPC Jazz Ensemble made the song shine. Repeated listening suggests Fools wasn't Group 22's best performance of the evening, but saying that is akin to complaining when Babe Ruth only hit a triple.

Wayne Corey,
FFS Wisconsin



**Wannabees were in full form
at the Convention.**