



# Fresh News

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## Ross Barbour, a Founding 'Freshman,' Dies at 82

By Douglas Martin Published, Ed August 23, 2011

In 1947, Ross Barbour and three other freshmen decided to take a year's break from college to take their barbershop quartet on the road. They soon morphed into the Four Freshmen, a close-harmony, jazz-inflected vocal group that is still going strong - albeit with performers who were not even born at the inception.

Mr. Barbour, who never managed to make it back to school, died at 82 on Saturday at his home in Simi Valley, CA, as the last of the founding members of the Four Freshmen. Dina Roth, a manager of the group, said the cause was lung cancer. Instead of studying, the Four Freshmen ended up teaching a fresh approach to close harmony, influencing the Beach Boys, the Mamas and the Papas, the Lettermen, the Manhattan Transfer and other groups. Their sound was characterized by long, lush chords - Mr. Barbour called them "purple chords" - and an improvisational style that made four voices seem like five or six. Each of the singers also played at least one instrument.

Brian Wilson, the genius behind the sound of the Beach Boys, was inspired by seeing the Four Freshmen when he was 15 at the Coconut Grove in Hollywood in 1958. He called them his "harmonic education."

The others in the original group were Mr. Barbour's brother Don, who was killed in a car accident in 1961; Hal Kratzsch, who died of cancer in 1970; and Bob Flanigan, who died in May.

The group has been widely described as the longest continuously performing vocal quartet of its kind in the United States, an accomplishment made possible by the constant matriculations of new freshmen. There have been a total of 23. Current members are Brian Eichenberger, Curtis Calderon, Vince Johnson and Bob Ferreira.

The Freshmen have recorded 50 albums and received six Grammy nominations. In the 1950s, the group's heyday, readers of *Down Beat* magazine named them best vocal group five times. In 2001, the Four Freshmen were the first group inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame.

"The Four Freshmen are the most innovative and emulated jazz vocal quartet ever to grace vinyl," Jay Warner, a music historian, wrote. "They performed with jazz greats like Duke Ellington and Count Basie."

The group's hits included *It's a Blue World*, *Mood Indigo*, *Day by Day*, *It Happened Once Before*, *How Can I Tell Her?* and *Graduation Day*.

