

Why Attend the Convention?

by John Emerson

Every year we have a convention celebrating the Four Freshmen. Our attendance hovers around 10-15% of our membership and, after having gone to most of them since 1996, the attendees are mostly the same group of members. So most of our Society stays home. I realize there are many reasons - cost (either of the convention or of travel), health, distance, etc. We've had the convention all over the country so it must have been fairly near one of those times. We do our utmost to keep the cost as low as we can. So if we get past those hurdles than there must also be a segment that doesn't see attending the convention as being very different than seeing the group at a local appearance.

Now I certainly don't want to disparage seeing them live. I see them every chance I get. But the convention is an entirely different animal. What you see and experience at the convention is not even close to the same. Starting first with the Four Freshmen, you see them perform with groups you'll almost never see outside of the convention. I've seen them with many big bands (Brooks Tegner, Dan McMillion, the Toledo Jazz Orchestra, etc.), with String Sections (both in Reno and in Fort Wayne), with five trombones and, most recently, with five trumpets. This last one convinced me that the convention is different. This performance with five top class trumpeters was not a rehash of their *Four Freshmen and Five Trumpets* album - only one song was taken from that recording. All the other material was brand new to the Freshmen and arranged by Curtis Calderon. You'll probably never see that outside of a convention.

In addition you get treated to a host of different groups "opening" for the Freshmen. I've seen The Lettermen, Sue Raney & Gene DiNovi, The Arbors, Uptown Vocal Jazz Quartet and Doc Watkins Texas Swing Septet to name a few. Some of these you can still see on their own (e.g., the Lettermen, Uptown or Doc Watkins), some don't perform anymore (The Arbors) and sometimes they are artists who almost never perform together (Sue Raney & Gene DiNovi). Again, it's a musical treat that is almost exclusive to these conventions.

Then there's Thursday night. The Four Freshmen Society has many top flight musicians in their membership and on the Thursday night of the convention the Society members perform in a three hour "jam session". The music is exceptional, the show is hosted by former Four Freshmen and we are usually treated to performances by them as well as other professional musicians in attendance. Again, this show is not something you will get to experience outside of the convention.

Lastly, there's the members themselves. I'm sure when you go see the Freshmen live locally, you'll be there with many Four Freshmen fans. The difference at the convention is that you get to spend time with

An Evening with the Freshmen at St. Joseph, Missouri

Harold Riehm, FFS Lawrence, Kansas

My kids call my wife, Donna, and me "groupies". And we are, I guess because anytime the Freshmen are playing within 300 miles or so ...we are there. Along with, of course buying and wearing out all their albums, attending an occasional Convention, and pleading with our kids to never let the great Freshmen tradition fade away.

So on September 12, it was off to St. Joseph. The concert, in a beautiful old and intimate theater, was, I think, one of their best. First time we'd heard the two newest Freshmen, and they are already perpetuating the Freshmen excellence, vocally and instrumentally, we have enjoyed over many years. Curtis led the audience through the history of the group, as only Curtis can, and updated us on exciting recent developments.

At one point Curtis, in joking with the obviously low-tech audience, asked how many present were members of the FF Society. A few hands went up, including ours. At intermission we were the focus of attention to many around us wanting to know what the Society was, how long had we been devotees, had we ever attended one of their Conventions and why we were so devoted. We reveled in the attention, but mainly because we could spread the FF Gospel. It helped, too, that Donna and I had on our shirts from the FF Cruise of ten or so years ago.

But all this notwithstanding, the beauty of the night was the music. An interesting combination of standards from the past along with new tunes and arrangements from the present, especially from their great new CD- "Four Freshmen and Friends". I confess to goose bumps and chills down my spine when I hear *Blue World* and other great FF standards and add new ones to that list.

Bob, thanks for being so good for so long ...we like the livelier version. And a special thank you to Curtis for his dynamic brass accompaniments and for his touching column in the last newsletter. We all know that money never has been nor will it probably ever be the primary motivating factor for members of the group. But love of music, respect for selections from the Great American Song Book, and appreciation of the unparalleled beauty of the harmony started by four guys 67 years ago, will forever be the basis of the music we love and that they perform so well. Thank you all for sharing your immense talent with us.

They were Hoosiers! — and I was too, from Kendallville, close to Fort Wayne and a little farther from Indianapolis, two important cities in the early history of the first Group. As a 1956 high school grad, amidst the transition from slow dancing to the music of Bill Haley and Elvis, the one true group we loved throughout was the Four Freshmen. It was that way then....and with us and so many more, it still is! As Bob so beautifully sings our hope is we will forever "keep the music playing".

A Freshmen Song Story

by L. Bisel, 55 year fan and FFS Representative.

I was walking my baby back home and wondered how can I tell her that my heart stood still, she stepped out of a dream and that there is no greater love in this whole wide world, and there will never be another you because you're so far above me.

She answered, please remember, it happened once before, I'm a fool to want you. I wish I didn't love you so, but teach me tonight and I'll remember April after you've gone. And, the very thought of you has got me crying again. Sometimes I'm happy, but I get along without you very well on the street of dreams.

I exclaimed, day by day, the more I see you come rain or come shine once in awhile I understand that I may be wrong, as in this whole wide world it all depends on you.

She answered, that's my desire but please remember you've got me crying again, but it's a pity to say goodnight, so don't worry about me and please walk softly on the street of dreams as this is the end of a beautiful friendship.

I'll be walking my baby back home day by day on route 66 in stormy weather. It's a blue world, but now you know so I'll be seeing you.