

The Fifth Freshmen: Erich Bucholtz, Audio Engineer

If you have attended a Four Freshmen convention sometime in the last 30 years, you have experienced the results of his work - but you may not know his name or even recognize his face. Erich Bucholtz is the magician behind the sound quality at many Four Freshmen performances.

Operating out of Latrobe, Pennsylvania as Bucholtz Productions, Erich has been an independent Audio Engineer (audio technician, sound mixer, sound man) since January, 1976. His clients have ranged from the Dalai Lama to George Carlin to Jefferson Starship and Vince Gill.

Erich's interest in music started early. He wanted to imitate his father, who played acoustic guitar. But when he was about 13 years of age he started getting interested in electronics. One of his neighbors, who had a garage high school band, invited Erich to their rehearsals and he started working with a mixer. The more he was around it the more he got caught up in it.

According to Erich, "Once I got involved in this, I came to a Y in the road: OK, I could be a musician, or I could do the technical end of the music industry. Because I felt that I had a knack for the technical end, I decided to go for it because I was young and could change directions if it didn't work out."



When he started running sound, his parents weren't happy because they didn't think there was a future for him. Later on, he did a show with Waylon Jennings and got tickets for his parents. They came early to see what he could do. The next day his dad said, "You know, son, I had no idea you had to work so hard for that job you do. Now I see why you sleep half the day when you get home."

When Pink Floyd, Erich's favorite band growing up, was scheduled to perform in Pittsburgh, he bought a dozen tickets and hired a limo for his mom and friends. Their seats were in the center of the room, and the sound was phenomenal. (Buford Jones from Tennessee was the mixer for that concert, and Erich got to meet him years later.) According to Erich, this was a milestone in his relationship with his mom. Sadly, Erich lost both of his parents within two weeks of each other in July, 2007.

Erich's relationship with The Four Freshmen began with an introduction by Chick Trafford, who brought in Group #18 (Kevin Stout, Mike Beisner, Greg Stegeman, Bob Ferreira) for a Habitat for Humanity fundraiser. Chick hired Erich who was well known in the Greensburg, Pennsylvania area.

Early on with The Four Freshmen, Erich noticed how crucial Bob Flanigan's perspective was in performing the arrangement the way he heard it. During sound checks Erich wanted to know exactly what he should do to get the sound Flanigan wanted.

One night Erich said to The Four Freshmen, "You guys are going to think I'm crazy — there are only four of you, but I am hearing five." They just laughed, because they knew that when a specific note hits a specific place at a specific time, it can actually double itself or create a phantom sound. It's called a sympathetic vibration. It can happen with any kind of instrument and be an octave higher or lower. When everything is exactly right on, the reward is that perceived extra vocal part that makes it better. The Freshmen don't really know when that happens because the monitors on stage don't have the right balance to let them know. That experience really broadened his mixing abilities.

Erich said, "I have had the opportunity to work with a lot of big bands and orchestras over the years, and I am so fortunate to have worked with these guys. When The Four Freshmen hire a musician, they don't hire just a run-of-the-mill musician — they hire someone who has extremely deep knowledge and talent in the music industry for that type of music."

Erich usually schedules a sound check before performances, but an empty room is not the same as when people are in the room.

According to Erich, "When people arrive, the entire atmosphere changes, and they start absorbing a lot of sound pressure levels and frequencies. So those first couple of minutes of the first song are extremely critical for me. I completely block out everything except the music.

"One thing I use is reverb. Reverb is created when soundwaves reflect off surfaces in a room to reach your ear so closely together that you can't interpret them as individual delays. The new reverb units have a spatial