



Fresh News

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The Four Freshmen

by Richard V. Duffy

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My first exposure to the Four Freshmen was in 1950 while playing tenor saxophone in the high school jazz band. I bought a few albums and soon I became captivated by their modern jazz harmonies. Only in the last decade-retirement-did I take an interest in the construction of their intricate harmony. I have yet to hear the Freshmen use vibrato; maybe at the tail end of a phrase - if any at all. I bring this up for a reason - vocal intensity of their sound as felt and heard by listeners. I took a look at the audio electronics centered around the use of vibrato and no vibrato. Here's what I hope will be a reader friendly scenario about waveforms of the music produced by the voices of Four Freshmen.

If we look at a voice signal -waveform- on an oscilloscope with no vibrato, we would see the fundamental tone, or note, and whatever harmonics are allied with the voice. If Don Barbour and Bob Flanigan were to sustain the same note with no vibrato, you might be able to tell which voice is which because of the distinct waveform of their individual voices. It's the relative amplitude and phase of all the harmonics that give each voice its characteristic sound.

When using vibrato, it makes the waveform compress and stretch slightly. When this happens, more energy is required. Without the use of vibrato, several benefits arise: The Freshmen voices project with more energy which leads to more intensity, providing the listener with the most uncanny modern jazz vocal sound in the history of the music.

During their five decades of harmonic domination - the vocal world of modern jazz vocalizing, the Four Freshmen underwent several personnel changes. In 1992 Bob Flanigan retired from performing and remained on as personal manager. After the Freshmen were on their way with the great sound they created, Bob Flanigan had this to say about their sound:

"After we first heard ourselves make that sound,
we never wanted to sing any other way."

One could go on writing about the five-decade career of the fabulous Four Freshmen. However, by now you should know who they are and the unique contribution they have made to the modern jazz arena of the vocal quartets. Here are a few closing words about the Four Freshmen:

We appreciate the many cards and good wishes for the Holiday Season. Please understand that we cannot respond to everyone unless you are on our psychic wavelength.

The modern musical wonder born from four innovative Freshmen who were responsible for the "Harmonic Renaissance of 1948," will continue ad infinitum. The name, "The Four Freshmen," prevails with continuance, in that it shall uphold the reputation of the four entrepreneurs who opened the door to a harmonic revelation - a new and refreshing music of a modern vocal quartet - using embellished harmonies.

I have yet to hear the Freshmen of today. I'm certain they covet the Freshmen name with respect.

About the author: Richard V. Duffy has been a musician since 1948 - clarinet. In 1950 the tenor saxophone became his lifetime companion. Later, with the help of a few arranging books, he taught himself to arrange music for big bands - 10 to 20 pieces, especially for his own big band.

Upon retiring from 28 years of aerospace engineering at TRW, Redondo Beach, CA, he moved to Mexico for what turned out to be an eight-year writing sabbatical. Of his many literary works, jazz articles for jazzreview.com, others in France and Italy, many articles on the Internet, two novels, three years researching Albert Einstein, and in the last three years, his masterpiece, "THE ABYSS OF JAZZ." The most unorthodox and powerful dissertation about jazz existent; now published "online" by <http://www.1stbooks.com>. The ABYSS is a culmination of over 50 years of exposure, experience, and knowledge of the subject - JAZZ!

FFS TO ACCEPT CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS

A bit of good news from your officers. In our continuing efforts to develop a well-established business framework to ensure the continuing success of our fan club you will very soon be able to use your VISA or MASTERCARD for dues, purchases from the Music Mart and convention registrations. Ray Brown, Jr. has been assisting in our efforts to establish a merchant account so that we may offer this service for the convenience of our members. Complete details will be included in the April 2003 issue of FRESH NEWS; however, the service should be available well in advance of that date.

We are having difficulty making credit card acceptance from our international members viable. Unfortunately it appears that special fees/costs from credit card providers in countries outside of the United States would make it impossible to absorb.