

## Four Freshmen in Norfolk, VA

John M. Emerson, VA

On Friday, January 18, 2002, the Four Freshmen appeared in Norfolk, Virginia. There was the third of four concerts in this years' *Jazz On Granby* series at the Roper Center for the Performing Arts. Last year, Mark Murphy set the attendance record for this venue with 648 (the capacity is a little over 800).

As I stood in the lobby with Dave and Lorraine it was clear the audience was mostly people who had been fans since the Fifties and Sixties, although there was a significant contingent of the audience that was too young to have heard them then. Of those who were fans prior to this concert, most were surprised to learn that the Freshmen were still performing. All too often, particularly with a group that's been around for so many years, the audience enters expecting a night of hits. They were about to be pleasantly surprised.

I have been a fan myself since the late fifties. My father always had Four Freshmen records and the first two records I ever owned were *On the Sunny Side of the Strip* by the George Shearing Quintet and *The Swingers*. Hearing them should be old hat to me. It isn't. I'll admit to a bout of goose bumps when, from offstage, the announcer said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the 2001 *Downbeat* Jazz Vocal Group of the Year - The Four Freshmen." Thank you Don Boland and Dave Barnes.

What happened next was most impressive. These four young men, carrying the mantle of the venerated **Four Freshmen**, literally ran on stage and started singing in the Freshmen style. What they did not do, however, was play it safe and simply sing Freshmen hits. From the old songbook we heard *Indian Summer*, *Invitation*, *Rain*, *I Remember You*, *I'm Gonna Go Fishin'* (with an ending note from Bob that was so low you could feel it in your gut). Mixed in with these were new additions: *If I Only Had a Brain* featuring Brian; *Young and Foolish*, arranged by Greg Stegeman; Bob Ferreira's *Love Dance*; *It Could Happen to You*; and *Around the World*, a new solo piece for Vince with whistling and sort of a doo-wop background by Bob, Brian and Curtis. Speaking of Curtis, what a wonderful addition. His trumpet-flugelhorn playing was superb, reminiscent of Chet Baker or Clifford Brown. The solos were wonderfully constructed, lyrical and exquisitely appropriate for the song. And of course the hits did show up - *Poinciana*, *It's a Blue World*, *Day In Day Out*, *Route 66*. These garnered applause as soon as the song was recognized. Surprisingly, *Walkin' My Baby Back Home* also received applause at the start. It must be that it is a perfect Freshmen song and I'm convinced everyone thought that they heard the Freshmen version 30 to 40 years ago.

As the concert ended with *I'm Always Chasing Rainbows* for an encore, the crowd filed back out into the lobby. Unlike the start, however, where the crowd was just milling around waiting for the show to start with only a modicum of enthusiasm, now the lobby was filled with real excitement. The audience all praised the group's musicianship & vocal talents, they lined up to purchase the *Still Fresh!* CDs (sales were lukewarm before the concert, and they asked where they could get more information or how they could join the Four Freshmen Society. All in all, the concert was a grand success. By the way, did I mention that

Mark Murphy held the attendance record for this venue? The operative word is "held." The new record is now 702 held by some group called The Four Freshmen!



Roger & Donna Lehman (NC) with The FF after Norfolk performance After-Glow which was hosted by Blake Cullen



Tom & Trudy Feigum (SD)



The family of the late Father Ray (NY) enjoys the AfterGlow - Jean Dolan, Rita Coney, Sherry Chereskin, Mary O'Brien, Howie Chereskin, Joanne Robertson, Margaret Baskin & John Coney