

Mini-Convention in Ardmore, Oklahoma

By Ann Smith, State Rep, N. TX

Hordes of FFS members traveled two hours or more (each way) from Texas to attend the Four Freshmen performance in Ardmore on March 8. There's no way to know exactly how many FFS members were there – but it was 20 or more. There was a waiting list for tickets that had 25 or 30 on it. Then there were many others who called in too late to get tickets and didn't ask to be put on the long wait list. There was one couple who came in from Dallas (four hours drive there and back) on the hope that there would be at least two no-shows. The good news is that they did manage to get tickets. One group of eight came from the Wichita Falls/Nocona area – four of them FFS members and four guests that they brought with them.

The people at the Goddard Center, site of the concert, said they had never had such a response in their life – not only sold out but such a long wait list and so many others turned down for tickets. They said they definitely plan to invite the Freshmen back – and it will probably be in three or four years.

This was a two-part engagement: a fund-raiser lunch, with a mini-concert (three songs) and then the evening performance. The songs performed included: "Route 66", "Poinciana", and "Walking My Baby Back Home". The \$25 a plate fund-raiser was attended by approximately 60 people. The menu for the luncheon is particularly noteworthy:

Four Freshmen Menu

(headed by the Hart cartoon of the Freshmen)

"Poinciana" (Chicken Caesar Wrap)

"Witchcraft" (Pasta with a Latin Beat)

"Day by Day" (Dreamy Fruit Salad)

"We'll Be Together Again" (Four Freshmen Desert)

"My Shining Hour" (Wine and Drinks)

In the many phone calls and discussions with the Goddard Center director, a delightful lady named Mort, I had gotten into some of the details about who the Freshmen are and how they got started and kept going all these years – including the Four Freshmen Society and its worldwide membership. She enjoyed hearing about it so much that she said, "Oh you must tell us about this at the luncheon". So, I did just that, outlining the highlights of the Freshmen history and introducing each of the current Four Freshmen, with some details of the musical abilities of each one. It was so amazing to me to be doing this, when I had been so in awe of the Freshmen as a teenager. They were such gods to me that it would never have occurred to me that someday I would even speak to them, let alone give a historical outline (with them in the room) and then introduce them. It was very well received and, believe me, the pleasure was all mine. The reason this is referred to as a "mini-convention" is that almost all of us coming in from out of state were staying at the same hotel and had plans to get together for meals. This was to include dinner prior to the concert, drinks afterwards, and then breakfast the next morning, for those that were interested.

Although the afterglow and breakfast the following day didn't materialize, we did have a gathering for dinner before the performance. We were expecting about 18 to show up – but some were on the road longer than they had expected. We did, however, have a group of nine for dinner – including current Freshmen, Vince Johnson. Vince is so good about making himself available to his fans; and we want him to know we really appreciate it.

Now to the evening concert. The Freshmen opened with a very energetic "Day In, Day Out", which was followed by a breathtaking rendition of "Invitation". Next was "Young and Foolish", which is new in their repertoire and a new arrangement as well. The following song was a dreamy rendition of "I Fall In Love Too Easily". Next was a fun rendition of "If I Only Had A Brain" from the Wizard of Oz. It features a vocal solo by Brian and has an additional highlight of Vince whistling. The whistle solos are something new that they've added during the past year and it always brings spontaneous cheers of appreciation from the audience. An interesting aside is how they happened to start using Vince's whistle solos. One day Vince was whistling in the bathroom (good acoustics) when Brian and Curtis heard him. They said, "Hey, dude, we didn't know you could whistle like that"! Then Bob walked in and said, "Hey, dudes, what are you all doing in the bathroom"? The rest is history.

Next on the program were: "Rain" and "Indian Summer" (new to me – and beautiful). Then we were treated to "All the Way Around the World", which featured a vocal solo by Vince, as well as some of his "scat" vocalization plus his solo on the bass – all big crowd pleasers. "I Remember You" merited spontaneous applause. Then we heard "There Will Never Be Another You", featuring Curtis playing his horn upside down (at the coaxing of the other Freshmen) – just for chuckles. The crowd sure thought it was fun. "I Concentrate On You" followed (a new arrangement, we were told) and then the first segment of the evening closed out with "Walking My Baby Back Home".

A lively intermission brought brisk CD sales – as well as much promotion of the FFS. You can imagine that fans who would drive so far to hear the Freshmen would have to stock up on CD's – and would be interested in the FFS if they weren't already involved in it. The second part of the program opened with an energetic "Route 66" – featuring Bob wearing a wig. (No, it wasn't the same huge black wig he wore at the Saturday night performance in Bowling Green – but it got just as many laughs.) Next we heard another Freshmen classic, "Poinciana", which was followed by "It Could Happen To You". Next was "Whistle Me Some Blues", featuring, of course, Vince whistling – and drawing spontaneous applause. This was followed by "Love Dance", featuring Bob's gorgeous solo voice. Next was the perennial crowd-pleaser "In This Whole Wide World", followed by "Gonna Go Fishin'" and one of the Freshmen's greatest hits, "Graduation Day". Another huge hit was next: "Day by Day". This was introduced by these "next generation" Freshmen as: "a song that made us rich and famous before we were ever born". It included a trombone solo by Vince as well as his novelty percussion played with drumsticks on the seat of a stool. It's great to see all the fun stuff the guys do – partly to entertain us and partly just to have fun themselves. Next was one of the