

Fresh Talk - Friday 8-9-2002

by Ann Smith (TX)

"Fresh Talk" is a panel discussion held by all the current and past Freshmen attending the convention. One of the questions asked was about how they each got started into music and then ended up being a Freshmen. The following are the replies.

Bill Comstock - In 1934, when he was about 9 or 20 years old, he started listening to a Duke Ellington record, which got him hooked on jazz. In his years before becoming a Freshmen, he met Ken Albers, who then joined the Four Freshmen. He also did a group with Ken Errair and then later became a Freshmen himself. Bill quipped, "I didn't have any idea I was joining an institution. Sue (his wife) says I should be institutionalized."

Brian Eichenberger - was 19 when he started with the Freshmen. He did vocal jazz for two years in high school and for two years in college. Then when he got out, he went straight into the Freshmen. He was referred to the group by his instructor. Bob Flanigan interjected a quote from Brian's instructor, who said that he was the most talented young man he'd ever taught - and that he was exactly the right choice.

Ross Barbour - was on the road at age 19. His family sang hymns in harmony. He reminisced by saying, "Us kids got charmed by it." He said it's something you don't get out of horns or a piano (the quartet sound). Hal Kratzsch is credited with the original idea of getting the group together. Ross wrapped up by saying, "Twenty-Nine years later I retired, undefeated."

Curtis Calderon - got bit by the jazz bug when he was in the 7th or 8th grade. He would stay up and listen to a 1-hour jazz program that came on the radio at 3:00 am - and that's what got him hooked on jazz. He played trumpet all through high school and then joined a road band after high school. Curtis met Brian four or five years ago at Jim Cullins Landing on the river walk in San Antonio, Texas.

Greg Stegeman - said he joined the Four Freshmen at age 38. He had always dreamed of being a Freshmen and said that it was perseverance, even more than talent, that finally made his dream come true. He said, "I finally got the call."

Ray Brown - was living in Jennings Creek, Kentucky, when he first heard the Four Freshmen. He is self-taught and used to hang out in bars listening to jazz as a teen. He said he played in a "bad group" after 'Nam and jammed with the Freshmen after performances. He said "I still love Bob, Ross, Ken, and Bill more than I do any of my brothers."

Bob Flanigan - sang in an army band. Afterwards he hustled fruit in Florida for Railway Express - by day - and worked all night at the "Ha Ha" Club. He left all this to join the burgeoning group that was to be known later as the Four Freshmen. He said "I think this group has had the greatest influence in the whole world." Recently he was guest of honor at a barbershop convention in Portland. They gave him a lifetime membership in their organization. Bob sang "Blue World" with a group from Dallas and he said he was so nervous that sweat was dripping off his fingers. He says he doesn't have any chops any more - but that's hard to believe.

FN Nov.-Dec. 2002

Bob Ferreira - was in a rock band in high school. They needed background vocals so they all joined the high school choir to improve their singing vocals abilities. Bob was in the jazz choir for two years in high school. In college he sang in a group called the Soundsations. That was at Central Washington University, where he studied opera, of all things. He was called in one day by his instructor, thinking he was going to be asked to be a counselor again at jazz camp. Instead, he was told that the Four Freshmen were looking for a drummer. That was 10 years ago last month - his 10th anniversary with the Freshmen. Bob's comment: "I want my pin!"

Vince Johnson - came in 30 minutes late and wearing dark glasses. He complains, good-naturedly, that Fresh Talk is held too early. He thinks it would be more civilized for late night performers to do the panel discussion around 1:00 pm. Vince says he always wanted to be a musician, especially from Jr. High and on up. He says he has all the Four Freshmen records and practically wore out the tape "Voices In Love" playing it in his car. He says that the Four Freshmen and Take Six are his favorite groups.

THE NEXT QUESTION WAS: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LARGEST AND SOME OF THE SMALLEST GROUPS YOU'VE PLAYED TO AS A FRESHMEN? The following are some of the replies.

Bob Flanigan said that the largest audience they played to was the Hollywood Bowl, holding about 17,000. He said that the smallest group was two - some guy hired them to play for his wife's birthday.

Ray Brown said that they played in a small club that only held 20 - but it was \$100 a seat.

Ross Barbour was asked if he would do a sequel to his book, Now You Know. He said that a lot had to be cut out to boil the book down to a reasonable size. The handwritten manuscripts that weren't included have been scattered with the passage of time. He said they had to leave out many interesting stories - and sometimes whole months at a time. Also, his information is sketchy for the years after he left the group. He said there probably wouldn't be a sequel if he had to write it, but if there were, it would have to be called Now You Know Some More. He encouraged one of the newer or current Freshmen to take up the quill and continue where he left off.

Ross also talked about a telescription they did of the song "That's My Desire." It was supposed to be the up and coming thing - but never happened. It was played on a scope-atone, which is like a juke box with pictures.

THE NEXT QUESTION PUT TO THE FRESHMEN WAS: HOW DO YOU GET THE 5TH TONE WITH ONLY FOUR VOICES?

Greg Stegeman replied that when you sing a C minor ninth, nobody sings the root - and it produces a 5-part harmony. They sing the 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th, and leave out the root.