

# WAYNE'S MUSIC WORLD: \$

By Wayne Corey, FFS Wisconsin

## The Bill Comstock Solos

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There would be four men performing. Then the stage lights would dim and a spotlight would shine on one man and his guitar. Bill Comstock would sing of seagulls crying on rain-swept beaches or a final curtain drawn on a love affair. **Summer Has Gone** and **Act III**, are tear-inducing ballads that would hush an audience and then bring them to their feet. Bill Comstock, balladeer.

And then there is his other solo incarnation: Bill Comstock, soul singer. Bill could wail those blues in the night. You heard it on *The Four Freshmen In Person – Volume 2*, an album built around Bill's singing and song writing. On that album, Bill gets by with a little help from his friends, Bob, Ross and Kenny. Bill takes three solos and the group wails about wailing on the Comstock composition, **Wail for the Bread**.

For thirteen years, 1960-1973, Freshmen fans heard Bill. Bob Flanigan and Ross Barbour also took solos during the live performances of FF Group #4 but Bill Comstock was clearly THE solo voice of the group. The strength of those performances made Bill's solos so memorable. FF fans who have followed this gentleman of jazz will recognize the criteria Bill used for picking those songs.

"Usually I look for quality in the music, in the lyrical composition and in the musical composition as well. Those (are the things) I always looked for. I was always vitally concerned with that," Bill told me. The musical quality. Yes, of course. Bill Comstock fans would expect nothing else.

What songs did Bill sing solo? Freshmen recorded history offers several.

The music and lyrics of two great song writers come together on the climatic finish to **In Person – Volume 2**. Harold Arlen wrote the music for **Blues in the Night**. Johnny Mercer added the lyrics. And Bill Comstock provided the soul. **Blues in the Night** was the title tune from a 1941 movie released just days before Pearl Harbor. The movie sank but the song has enjoyed a life that continues today. Six versions are reported to have charted 70+ years ago

and there have been dozens of recordings through the decades but no one has sung it live with the depth of feeling brought by Bill Comstock.

It is arguable that no recorded Freshman solo swings harder than Bill's **Take Your Shoes Off, Baby**. Gene Austin wrote the song in 1942 and the FF In Person II performance has Bill howling, Bob and Kenny blowing hard and Ross pounding the drums. It is mind-blowing hard-core jazz.

"Well, I heard that when I was a child," Bill told me. "Gene Austin's song. He had a lot of hits. I heard it from one of my uncles who played guitar and sang. Whether the (Freshmen) understood it or not, (the song) was well received (by audiences)." Listen again to the reaction of Ross, Flan and Kenny at the end of **Take Your Shoes Off, Baby**. Those guys are grooving hard!

Bill's take on **Do Nothin' Til You Hear From Me** illustrates his great ability to make a song his own. Duke Ellington, one of Bill's musical heroes, wrote it as **Concerto for Cootie**, a solo outing for trumpeter Cootie Williams. Bob Russell added words for Al Hibbler during WW II. Bill absolutely nailed it on *The Swingers*, the Bill Holman-arranged album from 1962. When Bill sings, **Pay No Attention To What's Said** the listener knows he is imploring the lady to stay away from those heart-breaking rumors.



Bill's **Do Nothin' Til You Hear From Me** absolutely cooks. Listen to Bob Flanigan's trombone solo on the recording. While Kenny Albers tastefully noodles his muted trumpet underneath Bill's voice, Flanigan roars on the break. Bill loves Ellington. "I grew up listening to Duke Ellington and his music. It was something that I revered. When I was ten years old my mother brought home the Ellington record of *Sophisticated Lady*, which is one of his compositions, and that took me into a completely different set of feelings. I realized for the first time what music could be...and what it was. I thought of that all my life." (continued on page 8)