

FROSH GET STANDING 'O' IN OBISPO

Jim Healey, FFS California

Group 23 was a big hit tonight at the Cuesta College Performing Arts Center in San Luis Obispo, Ca. They sang two albums worth of fan favorites starting with *Poinciana* (sorry Greg, no UHH! finish) and ending with *Day By Day*.

Included were three solos I'd never heard before. Brian gave a soulful rendition of *Cold Cold Heart* and Bob paid tribute to Louis Prima with a spirited, over the top vocal on *Just A Gigilo* and *Hallelujah I Love Her So*. Let's hope we hear these solos in every concert. For their encore we got a beautiful mike-free accapella of *Their Hearts Were Full of Spring* followed by *Surfer Girl*.

The opening act was a group of Cuesta College students called "Voce". These seven women and four men wowed us with their harmonic gymnastics singing *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Basically Speaking*, *Teach Me Tonight* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Curtis enhanced this last one with his fine trumpet work. Voce has been singing since 1981. They have toured Europe ten times, performed at many jazz festivals, often winning first place awards as well as an "Outstanding Performance Award" from Downbeat magazine.

The concert was a fitting finish to this 15th annual two day vocal jazz workshop featuring students from many high schools. When I asked Jennifer Page why she brought two dozen students all the way from Murieta High School in Southern California, she said: "In the Spring, these kids have to sing, so in the Fall I need to make sure they've heard some professional performances like this one."

In the lobby, local FFS members Jim and Anita Bennie set up an arresting display picturing all the Freshmen groups including the new one with Stein Mulvey. They had handouts listing the groups by years of service, another giving all the tour dates up to October of 2014

Here are some other things I observed that night. A man told the Bennies that he came to hear Vince because he was a friend of his parents. Yes, he stayed.

A bit later two fellows were looking at the original group photo and told me they had gone to junior high with Cathy Barbour and had forgotten until this very moment that her dad sang with the Freshmen.

In Ft. Wayne, Brian told me that he'd sing *Brain* (my wife's favorite) if we came tonight. I wrote a note reminding him of this, put it in a sealed envelope and gave it to a lady on staff. To make sure she would give it to Brian before the show, I told her it contained the money I borrowed from him at the convention and it was due right now. It worked! At one point Curtis said that Bob was the only guy in the group with a real man's voice. After they sang *The Day Isn't Long Enough*, Brian said, "Yes it is. It's got 25 hours in it. Don't forget to set your clocks back an hour." I missed the funny stuff that Curtis usually tells. He was strangely quiet. Has marriage made him more serious?

There were only a handful of FFS members in the audience, but the Bennies told me they added three new ones tonight.

The Bill Comstock Solos (continued from page 7)

An early Bill Comstock-Duke Ellington-Four Freshmen tie was heard in 1958 when Bill penned lyrics to *Chelsea Bridge*, the jazz standard penned by Ellington alter ego Billy Strayhorn. Freshmen Group #3 put it on their vastly-underrated *Voices in Latin*, another album of Pete Rugolo charts.

What was Bill seeking when he wrote lyrics for songs? "I looked, of course, for melodic content. What I hear in my head is very important to me. That's how I learned to play – listening to the sounds in my head and trying to develop from them. I never had any training at all. I taught myself to read music. I was in the music business for several years without knowing how (to read music). I learned enough to write music." *Act III* and *Summer Has Gone* are Bill's two stunning ballads that Freshmen fans revere. *Act III* is heard on *FF In Person Volume 2* and *Live in Tokyo*. *Summer Has Gone* appears on the *Live at Butler* album. Bill wrote both with Gene DiNovi, who Bill describes as a "close companion. We did a lot of things together," including, obviously, writing wonderful songs.

2013 FFS convention jam session attendees witnessed special moments with those two songs. We were hushed by David Bentley's performance. The look on the faces of Comstock family members was a highlight of the convention. "I was very pleased. Dave and I have been friends for, gosh, I guess 45 or 50 years. He has one of my guitars that I gave to (the FFS) for a raffle at one of the conventions. Dave bought it. He's played it ever since," Bill said the next day.

Act III and *Summer Has Gone* use both melody and lyrics to paint a melancholy picture of lost love. Bill's lyrics always seem to do more than capture a mood. The lyrics perfectly define moments in life. "I see things in them that a lot of people don't have any more," Bill told me.

Doris Day recorded probably the best known version of *Summer Has Gone* on her *Latin for Lovers* album in 1965. The lyrics and melody are the same but the gentle Latin beat adds a different dimension to a marvelous song.

Bill has been an important factor in the lives of all of us. He wrote, sang and played much of the most important music in the lives of people for whom music is really important. The affection between FFS members and Bill is wonderful to behold. At the Fort Wayne Hilton Bill graciously chatted with every fan seeking a word with him. He sat in the lobby and smiled as fans came by to converse, to shake his hand or to take a photograph.

We'll have more musical thoughts from Bill Comstock in a future issue of Fresh News. Bill's music has been with Freshmen fans for more than a half-century. I remember – and you remember -- hearing his first recordings with the Freshmen. And then we began to hear the solos. That music...those solos... remain amazingly, well, fresh.

