

Wayne's World: Professor Stegeman

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The irony is that when people think of the up-tempo things they kind of think well, that must have been easy to do, because we're just swinging along. But all those things are harmonized. So something like *Route 66* when you are rehearsing, you have to do those parts as if they are ballads to make sure everyone knows what their part is and how it works and (get) all those chords lining up."

What is the most difficult arrangement the Freshmen ever sang? Greg knows what revered founding Freshman Ross Barbour believed.

"Ross said that *Midnight Sun* from *More Four Freshmen & Five Trombones* was the most difficult chart they ever did. In fact, they had to record it in phrases. It took them a while to get four bars. Then they had to stop and work on the next four bars."

What makes *Midnight Sun* so difficult?

"It's chromatic. That's all half-steps. (He sings) 'Your lips were like a red and ruby...' They're all very close tones, but they have to be really accurate. You have to start harmonizing that, too. The melody itself is very difficult. It's not an openly natural melody. Very chromatic. Very sophisticated harmony. We're talking Pete Rugolo arrangements. Probably more harmonically advanced than even Dick Reynolds ever got with the Freshmen. So it was really a challenge. Plus the melody is quite a (challenge). (He sings) 'Warmer than a midnight sun.' That interval is a major 7th. So the melody itself is very

difficult, and then you're harmonizing it with four parts. Sophisticated jazz harmony. I think that's what made it so difficult."

More Four Freshmen & Five Trombones has always been a favorite of this writer. It's a good example of the strength of "new standards" in the 1960s Greg mentioned. That album uses virtually all new-at-the-time songs that became major parts of the Great American Songbook. Ross Barbour once told me the Freshmen picked the songs for *More Five Trombones* "because they are great songs," without much thought to their durability.

Greg has his ideas about the most difficult arrangements he personally recorded with the Freshmen.

"I found *Their Hearts Were Full of Spring* to be really tough because it was a cappella and very sophisticated and everyone has to really nail their parts for it to really ring. And that's not enough. It's such an emotional song lyrically, too. You can't just sing the notes. It's a deeply emotional song and that was always a challenge. I've had the unique experience of singing both the top part and the third part on the arrangement and they're both really hard to do. And it's my favorite. I remember hearing it on the radio when I was in high school and it stopped me dead in my tracks."

Of the numerous charts he wrote for the group, Greg names *Where Do You Start* as his favorite. He concedes that his arrangement of *Unforgettable*, is the chart always mentioned by Freshmen fans. "Bob Flanagan himself said it was one of the greatest arrangements the Four Freshmen ever did so I carry that with me with great pride." He should! And we can all be grateful that more than a dozen years after he left the group, Greg Stegeman is still helping all of us understand that wonderful Four Freshmen "sound."

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