

"Genuine Imitation Life Gazette"

Article Printed in USA Circa 1969

Popular Four Seasons Try New Album Style

The Four Seasons, who have been looking for a way to escape their bubble-gum music of old, have found their thing in their latest album, "Genuine Imitation Life Gazette," (Phillips).

Besides being their best recording effort in some time, "Gazette" represents a new approach in album making.

The "Gazette" album cover is a newspaper-of-sorts with 14 pages. It has

everything; real news, pure fantasy, social commentary and sheer lunacy. Even the lyrics to songs are written as news stories.

But the album is anything but usual Four Seasons. The opening cut ("American Crucifixion & Resurrection") attempts to show the human longings of the black man, while the haunting "Genuine Imitation Life" is a satire on practically everybody.

Some will argue that the music has no dancability and they are right. The album is for listening—and well worth it.



Four Seasons... A Different Approach

THE GENUINE Imitation LIFE GAZETTE

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Flip Side

Four Seasons Make News

By MARGE PETTYJOHN
A newspaper is, by definition, a chronicle of current information, a paper printed and distributed to convey news, advocate opinions, provide entertainment, etc.

And that's why the Four Seasons' latest album, THE GENUINE IMITATION LIFE GAZETTE (Philips), is like a newspaper.

But if you expect to hear the kind of hit songs that began the quartet's golden career back in 1962 (with songs like "Sherry," "Walk Like a Man," "Dawn"), then maybe you'd better buy one of the Four Seasons' greatest hits albums instead.

A statement of fact, value and reality, the album is a strong and honest comment on life while at the same time uniquely entertaining, compelling and fascinating. Another milestone in contemporary music, the package alone is worth the price of the album and the record could easily be one of the most important, creative and sophisticated contemporary recordings since the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper."

"THE GAZETTE" ("Four Seasons Edition . . . published once a lifetime by Blowin' Winds Syndicate") features six newspaper-format pages as part of the actual album cover and eight in the form of a tabloid supplement.

Why a newspaper format? "The scope of a news format gave us so many different directions to work from—humor, satire, truth and a host of other areas," explains Philips' art director Des Strobel, who supervised the complex packaging project.

The Seasons themselves believe it might take a week for the buyer to read and figure out just the printed portion of his purchase.

This could be true. THERE'S NEWS, special columns (even Earl Wilson), society features, stock market and farm news, editorials, weather ("Today—brisk, even sparky"), real estate and travel sections, sports (including American and National "Rock League Standings") and, of course, entertainment—a crossword puzzle, daily horoscope, radio-TV log and "High Frequency Funnies."

Although each cut on the LP could be heard singly with im-

pact, the effect of listening to the entire program is overwhelming. Some of the tunes have that unique, recognizable Four Seasons harmony, some are vibrantly uptempo and others are purely mellifluous. But most noticeable are the emotion-charged lyrics and the mellow, intense intonation given each song.

The music, like the package, is a potpourri of themes, opinions and styles, from the old "Sabre Dance" in "American Crucifixion and Resurrection" to an altering of words in the theme song that come out "Pray, Jude" (instead of "Hey Jude").

"The Genuine Imitation Life Gazette" song expresses vocally the urgency, compassion and sentiment of the full-scale dramatic musicale: "People rubbing elbows but never touching eyes . . . People buying happiness and manufactured fun . . . You find the right direction, someone tears up all the track . . . It's a lovely place to visit but I wouldn't want to stay."

The Four Seasons' new style and meaningfulness showcased in this LP are definitely not like, say, "Sherry."

"I GET A LITTLE tired of hearing people say, 'Why don't you do the Four Seasons, why don't you be what you used to be?'" says member Bob Gaudio, who either alone or with Bob Crewe has written and produced most of the group's 40 hit records.

"Our new records are still not 'Sherry.' You just grow up. How can you be what you were seven years ago? If you are, you're in a lot of trouble."

The Four Seasons in "Gazette" are not preaching, teaching or trying to show you something you don't already know; they're mostly expressing their personal laments for much of the plastic walls we build around ourselves.

But "The Genuine Imitation Life Gazette" is more than just another package of songs, too.

It's a mirror of life, a part of life. Like the daily news, its reports and comments are as timely as the clock and calendar.

And, like the daily paper, it's paper with words and pictures on it. Like this.



The Four Seasons pause during playback sessions following their recording of "The Genuine Imitation Life Gazette." Left to right are Frankie Valli, Tommy DeVito, Bob Gaudio and Joe Long.



**Article extract taken from the book
All Or Nothing At All – A Life of
Frank Sinatra by Donald Clarke
and published by Pan Books in
1997. Note the Seasons' connections!**

And then came the worst boondoggle of all, or the biggest tragedy, depending on how you look at it. *Watertown* was not a bad idea: a middle-aged man in a small town watches his wife leaving him. Maybe she's bored, maybe he's taken her for granted, but he doesn't know why she's leaving; all he knows is that a part of his life is over. It is virtually the only time Sinatra commissioned anything like dramatic music or a song cycle for himself, and the project was bungled badly.

Goodfellas (1990) is one of the all-time best gangster movies, written and directed by Martin Scorsese. It has a scene in a neighborhood nightclub where the thugs and their women are being entertained by one of those Italian-American singers who had brash hit records in the late 1950s—early 1960s, and it is perfectly judged: the banality of the entertainment is matched by the banality of the people, the men all pointing their suits at each other and the women all looking like retired pizza waitresses. The singer in the film is Dion Belmont or somebody like that; in fact maybe it's Frankie Valli. Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons (named after a bowling alley in New Jersey) had over forty hit singles starting in 1956, many of them co-written by Bob Gaudio (a former member of the Royal Teens, as in "Who wears short shorts") and Bob Crewe, who'd come from Swan Records, one of those labels like Cameo and Parkway that came from nowhere to have so many hit singles in that era that they helped trigger a congressional investigation into payola. Apparently Frankie Valli had bragged to Frank Sinatra that the reason they had so many hits was that Gaudio had written them; and Bob Gaudio was hired to co-write, co-arrange and produce *Watertown*.

It was going to be done for television, but an album was all that resulted. The backing tracks were recorded in July 1969 in New

York, and overdubbed by Sinatra later in Los Angeles. According to John Ridgway's *Sinatrafile*, the recording sessions used over thirty musicians including strings, but they sound like a cabaret bar-band, with a thumping electric bass and banal rhythms throughout. The writing for strings may as well have been an off-the-shelf synth program, except that hadn't been invented yet; the first song has a choo-choo sound in it as the wife leaves, a device that thankfully wasn't available for Schubert's song cycles. Nearly all the ten songs are faded out at the end, a first for a Sinatra album, and the sure sign of an arranger who can't think of anything to do.

Watertown is so hard to listen to that one wonders if something might have been done with the songs; Gaudio had had a number of years practicing as a writer, after all, and Nelson Riddle might have made something of some of the songs, we'd like to think. But there was not enough inspiration on this team. The fact is that Gaudio was one of those who helped turn rock'n'roll into what we now call 'pop music', elbowing other musics out of the marketplace. Rock was supposed to be a gloriously raucous and uninhibited pig's ear, at its best retaining its country-music heritage as a superb vehicle for a troubador's story-songs; but no matter how many hacks try to make a silk purse out of it, that's never going to work. The tunes on *Watertown* are simple and repetitious rockaballads, and the words are banal; not even Sinatra can make the word 'tragedy' rhyme properly with 'in the tea'. At the end of the last song, the singer thinks his wife is coming back, but apparently she doesn't get off the train. Maybe she's in New York listening to Bobby Short.

Gene Lees, who attended one of the recording sessions for the first album with Jobim in 1967, was glad that Sinatra refused to record with headphones on. People who recorded with Tommy Dorsey in 1940 know that the headphones belong on the engineers, not the musicians; they also know that the singer sings in the same room at the same time with the band. Why did Sinatra agree to overdub *Watertown*? Why did he surrender to this rubbish two years after the Jobim album? Sinatra sounds terrible on *Watertown*; his diction sticks out because it is wasted on the material. The truth is that, although he chose good songs in the 1940s and mostly stuck with them through the 1950s, he always wanted to sing *contemporary* songs, and the craft of songwriting was falling on hard times. I think he tried to get into Gaudio's stuff, but couldn't manage the plaintive, self-serving whine that this kind of music requires; if he was trying to sound like Frankie Valli, he failed. Having divorced Mia, he should not have tried to dabble in the music of her era.

4 seasons

To be successful in the popular music business, you have to offer something that the public wants. Frank Sinatra has done that longer and more successfully than anybody else in history. Nobody else had come *close* to having hits with new albums for fifty years. I would nominate as his best single 'Everything Happens to Me' (with Dorsey in 1941), and as his best album *Songs For Swingin' Lovers* (with Riddle in 1956), and these were but two Sinatras: the young, sweet voice and the hip, more mature playboy (both before stereo, but before and after Ava Gardner). Other Sinatra fans will have their own nominations (a charming British novelist, who I met at a party once, will be sore at me for dumping on *Watertown*). But the arguments are fun, because we can talk endlessly about songs and arrangements, and about what we get from each record; and about one thing we can agree: there has never been anybody else like Sinatra, and there never will be again.

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