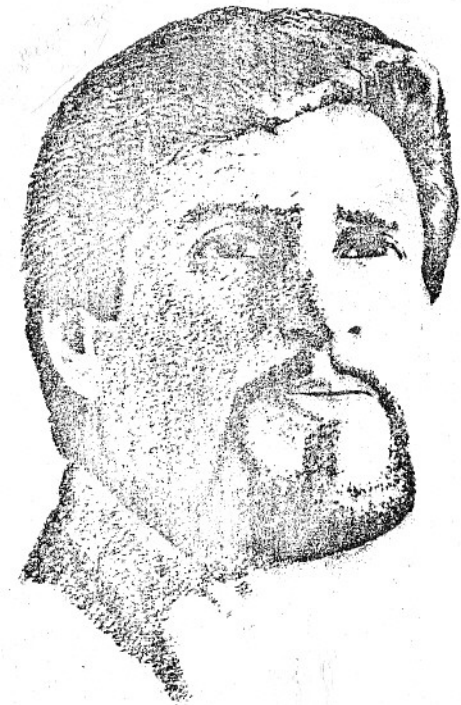


Article taken from the book *Inside Pop* author David Dachs and published by Scholastic Book Services, New in April, 1968. The Book deals with America's Top 10 groups and includes the Beach Boys, Monkees, Mamas and Papas and the Lovin' Spoonful!

chapter 11



Bob Gaudio



Tommy De Vito

IN THE STUDIO-DEN of Bob Gaudio's white colonial home in Montclair, New Jersey, there is a piano and tape equipment. But a prominent part of the decor is a glittery juke box packed with the record-hits of the Four Seasons: "Sherry" (the first big smash), "Big Girls Don't Cry," "Walk Like a Man," "Dawn," "Rag Doll," "Candy Girl," "C'mon Marianne." Here, Bob Gaudio, the bearded organist who writes most of the group's songs, Frank Valli,

PRODUCING THE HIT RECORDS

the four seasons



Joe Long



Frankie Valli

lead-singer, Tom De Vito, and bassist Joe Long gather to shape the distinctive sound that has resulted in phenomenal record sales: more than fifty-five million LPs and singles in five years. They rehearse here mostly because all of them live in New Jersey and because, as Gaudio puts it, "I have a long driveway."

"We basically like what we do. We're not the Beatles, we're not this, we're not that. And we must be doing

something right, for we have sustained ourselves for more than five years. The hardest part is the traveling—the trains, the buses, the getting in and out of planes. But there's no complaints," says Gaudio of the Four Seasons. "It's been beautiful."

Sometimes, of course, the Four Seasons sit still. There's a front cover of a recent Four Seasons' LP, *The Gold Vault Hits* in which Bob, Frankie, Tom, and Joe sit on simulated bars of gold. This may be slightly exaggerated, but not very much. Sticking close to teen-slanted romantic themes, the New Jersey group have had a fantastic track record in making hit records for Philips, especially when you consider the following facts:

Ninety-five per cent of most recordings (singles and LPs) fail. Out of about eleven thousand recordings issued each year in the U.S. by approximately one thousand record companies, most do not earn back their production costs. Figuring on a conservative average of four thousand dollars per record (singles cost from several hundred to several thousand; an album can cost twenty-five thousand dollars) the total production cost (labor, materials, work) is roughly forty-four million dollars. Only a relatively few make money for the company, the artists, or the writers of the material.

The Record Industry Association of America disclosed that in 1966, it gave only twenty-three golden record awards for single discs that sold one million copies and fifty-eight to albums that had sales of more than one million dollars, or a total of eighty-one.

In a world of kicky clothes, psychedelic sounds, and mixed-media presentations (film, electronic sounds, rock music), the Four Seasons are conservative. They are a

hard-working group with fairly regular family lives. Most live in Eastern suburban New Jersey, along with many other songwriters, record executives, and show people. They aren't teenagers but pro's in their late twenties and early thirties.

The working schedule of the Four Seasons doesn't always encompass the four seasons. "Six or seven months we're usually working, performing at concerts, night clubs. The rest of the time we're home, resting, rehearsing, preparing for our recordings," says tall and thin (6'4") Gaudio, father of two small girls. Gaudio is somewhat of a businessman, too. He owns the Tiki, a Polynesian restaurant in Tappan, New Jersey, covering approximately fifteen acres, suitable for real estate development.

"A group that plays together lives together," says Gaudio. "It's like a family. There are problems, arguments. That's why, when we travel, we always get single rooms. You can't be together all the time. You need some privacy."

A key figure in the success of the Four Seasons is 5'6" Frankie Valli. He provides a looping, soaring tenor sound to the group; he's almost a male mezzo-soprano. When they do a song, Valli's high range is singled out and spotlighted. This is a trademark of the Four Seasons' sound. The group supports Valli, singing and playing the accompaniment. Father of three young girls, Valli collects big-band recordings. His favorites are Woody Herman and Stan Kenton. He's fond of sketching portraits, and cartooning. Of the visual arts, Valli says: "Young people today have a greater interest in the arts. Years ago, most young people thought mostly about work."

Another New Jerseyite is Tommy De Vito. He's a baritone, plays guitar, and does a lot of onstage clowning. He

has a daughter and a son. He's a fanatical golfer. Joe Long is a new member of the group. He replaced Nick Massi. He plays stringed bass, and was recently married to a twenty-one-year-old New Jersey girl.

Still another potent factor in the success of the Four Seasons is a blonde, blue-eyed, All-American type, who works behind the scenes. He's Bob Crewe. He's good-looking enough to be a professional male model, which he once was. He is one of the many independent record-producers active in the pop world today. He has the Four Seasons under personal contract. He produces their records, chooses their material, chooses their arrangements, says *what* is to be released *when*. Philips merely provides the distribution system and assists in promotion.

The front door of his New York offices list so many Crewe corporations that you'd need an LP just to mention them. They include Genius Inc., Saturday Music, Four Seasons Music, Dyna-Voice (a record company), Tomorrow's Tunes. At a long, executive conference table in his inner suite, Crewe spoke about the emergence of the independent record-producer.

"It is very similar to what has occurred in the motion picture field," he explained, "where a producer or director felt he knew what to do with a property and the establishment did not." Crewe added that he got tired of record companies misinterpreting his songs, handling them badly. So he started to produce his own records. The business has changed, he argues, for today it is not only the song, but the conception of sounds.

It must be noted that each record company of some size has its own A & R (Artists and Repertoire) directors. Some are paid as little as five thousand dollars a year, and some

up to and over fifty thousand dollars with bonuses—dependent on their success. However, since World War II, there's been a surge of independent A & R men, such as Crewe. They free lance. Crewe does not work for the record company. Often the record-producer is more than a record-producer. He's part of a complex group which embraces record-making, management of artists, and music publishing—a sort of vertical show-business set-up. How did these independent A & R producers get their start? "An awful lot of producers came out of demo-making [demonstration records of new songs or talent]. It got so that we said 'We're making great "demos." Let's go a step further and make great records.'"

The workings of Bob Crewe are most interesting. "My artists are under contract to me. There's nobody in a high office on Madison Avenue telling me what to do, telling me what I should cut. I am not a personal manager. They're signed to me as if I was a record company. They have a contract with me. I go to Columbia or Philips and say, 'Distribute it.' I pay my artists. I am totally independent."

There are many legal variations of this type of record-producing structure. Others doing the same sort of thing are Don Kirschner (a pioneer in the field) and Koppelman and Rubin. The legal aspects "fill law books," says Crewe. "Some of it is very strange."

Practically all independent record-producers get paid on a royalty-per-disc basis. On a million-selling pop single hit, Crewe can earn approximately thirty-six thousand dollars. Besides income as a record-producer, he makes more if he wrote the song or published it. Of course, it is wise not to be greedy, says Crewe. "You have to be care-

ful to get the very best material for the artist, and not put in your own songs just because you publish them. When you're a producer you have to decide which hat you're wearing. I'm a writer, an arranger, and a publisher. But I have to decide what is the *best* material for the artist."

Crewe says that skilled arrangers sometimes turn independent record-producers and flub badly. They become so "in love" with the arrangements they've written that they can't change them, even though they may not be right. "The true producer is like an editor. He's willing to change, to try something else, to scrap what's already been done," says Crewe.

The Four Seasons swear by Crewe, who recently moved to a new, big post with Dot Records (which is owned by Paramount Pictures). Statistically, Crewe has shaped recordings which have sold an estimated hundred million copies. Besides the Four Seasons, he has produced recordings and shaped acts for such talents as Sarah Vaughn, Liza Minnelli, and Leslie Gore. He also writes and produces TV commercials. In his spare time, he paints and fashions constructions with shells, glass, and poppy seeds. It was Crewe who produced Diet-Pepsi's "Girl Watchers' Theme," which later became a top instrumental hit, with the commercial message taken out and retitled "Music to Watch Girls By."

The Four Seasons-Crewe combination started in the early 60's. The New Jersey group came to New York, eager to produce a hit sound. They were known then as the Four Lovers. Crewe employed them as background voices. Finally, the group asked Crewe to produce recordings with them. Taking a song written by Bob Gaudio, Crewe produced the first million-seller of the group in 1962, "Sherry."

Lead singer Frankie Valli (now heard as a single artist as well as a member of the Four Seasons) is a self-taught drummer and has been singing since high school days. Bob studied classical music piano for almost eight years before he turned to pop music. He began writing as a young teen and long has admired modern jazz. Musically, Tommy adds a rich baritone voice to his self-taught guitar playing. Joe has been a music student since he was eight. Originally, he played accordion, but an accident to his hand impaired the delicate fingering needed and he switched to the bass. Joe, prior to joining the Four Seasons, worked in café-lounge acts, touring the country extensively. He's played Las Vegas and a lot of towns between there and Jersey.

Often, when not on the road, the Jerseyites will gather and talk shop: ideas for the act, songs, stage presentation, or the myriad other facets such as sound, lighting, transportation problems, and costuming. Or they'll gather at the Manhattan office of Bob Crewe, who with Bob Gaudio has cowritten a number of their hits. Here, amid the frenzied atmosphere of Crewe's production firm, Genius Inc., they will huddle and look over hundreds of songs that have been submitted for their consideration. Gaudio and Crewe may steal off to a corner to polish a lyric or alter the melody of a new tune they've turned out. Arrangements are discussed.

Sometimes they will be found at a Jobs Corps center performing free for young people learning professional skills. And sometimes they might be found in the darkened recesses of the Bitter End, a Greenwich Village nitery owned by their personal manager, Fred Weintraub. Here, in the revealing glow of a naked worklight atop an

empty but confining platform stage, they will rehearse mike technique and movement which will later turn up on their TV appearances or at concerts. (In 1966-67 the group gave one hundred and twenty college concerts.)

While Crewe holds the reins as record-producer, the Four Seasons do more than sing at recording sessions. They, along with producer Crewe, insist upon hiring the very best back-up musicians, utilizing the finest available studios and the most proficient recording-mixing engineers in the industry. When recording, they disdain clock-watching and will go over and over a tune until completely satisfied with it in every way. Often the boys will race from the microphones into the control room to hear a playback, to discuss volume and level controls with the engineers, and to make on-the-spot changes in the arrangement.

The quiet professionalism of the Four Seasons shines through like a harvest moon. Recently, when they appeared at Expo 67, the *Montreal Gazette* wrote: "The Four Seasons are showmen, professionals, without distasteful slickness. Their gags, running banter, and music come out smoothly, if often thunderously. They are good. Few groups or individuals have been as consistently popular with the teens as the Seasons. When you consider that there is nothing as fickle as the young, their success is in its proper perspective."

(S)
Rag Doll

Gold Records

(LP)
Gold Vault Hits
2nd Gold Vault Hits

