

“To Be Or Not To Be”....A Four Seasons Fan Club?

by Ken Charmer

That is the question”Lynn, George, Ray and I have been considering over the last few months. The success of Jersey Boys in America and the launch of the play on London’s West End has ‘raised the bar’ and generated such a level of interest on both sides of the Atlantic that we are now seeing the re-issue of Frankie Valli’s solo albums from the 70s.

Being a long-time Four Seasons collector however you learn to not get too carried away....after years of being disappointed.

But when you get a phone call from one of the Four Seasons on Christmas Day you know you’ve achieved the peak of ‘fandom’. When former members of the group show how they value the fans they entertained it makes the fan based research and publication work worthwhile.

That happened to me this year and prompted me to examine with my long-time friends 40 years of what was ‘**The Frankie Valli and the The Four Seasons’ UK Appreciation Society**’ back in 1975, when I joined. So I stopped to ask ‘What are we today?’, and to consider our research and the efforts made to support the Partnership over the years.

It seems a bit strange to think of yourself a pop fan when you are over 30!! I thought, as I asked “what is or was a pop ‘fan’ and are fan clubs relevant today.?”

The www now abounds with fan clubs for even the most obscure artists and many have found them a useful conduit for their music and enjoyed a new career. One of the artists that came from the Bob Crewe stable who has utilised the web successfully is Eddie Rambeau. He has generated new music through his web site for fans even though few in number.(insert Link)

Fan clubs date back to the 18th century but the longest running today appears to be “Club Crosby” which was established in 1936 for Bing Crosby.. Fans are “**obsessive collectors of old recordings, films, photos and newspaper clippings**”, according to Paul Theberge in [“Everyday fandom: Fan Clubs, Blogging and the Quotidian Rhythms of the Internet.” Canadian Journal of Communication Vol 30 2005.](#)

We found a similarity with our group in what he says of the Crosby Group...”**it is clear that fan knowledge itself – often exhaustive in its scope and depth – ultimately places fans in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the culture industry: in their quest to know everything possible about stars and their personae, fans develop a significant potential for cultural awareness and critique**”





This has been the case with the UK FV group but the revolution has been how the www has changed things. Originally the UK fan club was set-up to share information and merchandise like records and tapes and concert news and reviews. The idea was perhaps that the club would be 'official' and provide a link with the stars. Whilst that was in the interests of the Partnership, promoting the group, there was sometimes communication.

The concept that knowing the stars background and personae would enhance the experience of the music was perhaps always part of the fan culture. Back in the 70s the availability of information and in particular records was much more restricted. Fans were searching for the latest and past releases

frantically trying to catch up with what they had missed in the groups 15 year career. The main medium for sharing music was something that appears archaic today...the cassette tape.

Now music is so accessible and disposable the role of a fan club has changed. The Four Seasons Partnership has never been able to develop a relationship with the fans and the UK group exists in spite of, rather than because of the 'Partnership.'

So are we a fan club or something else.? The history of the club, and perhaps the 'Partnerships' unsupportive attitude, cannot be ignored. Since the collapse in 1982 of the formal subscription fan club we have been a collective of volunteers researching what interested us. Whilst the protection of Frankie and Bob's financial interests in an industry plagued by greed and corruption is a major task and understandable, alienation of the fan base is not a wise move, and something they may now regret. But business is business!

The lack of openness and communication by the Partnership has become less of a problem as our focus has been more and more on remaining independent and gathering research to add to our already huge database of articles and historical information. As Paul Theberge describes, we have become...."**conduits for the circulation of memorabilia**"...and every item we have gathered has become "**a piece of autobiography**" irrespective of whether it is 'official'....and because we operate either outside or on the fringes of the industry we often "**reveal aspects of the star making machinery that might otherwise be hidden**". But that perhaps has been the problem. As a result we believe we have developed "**a significant potential for cultural awareness and critique**" and seek to do this responsibly.

The real benefit of this history is that we have **remained 'un-official'(and totally non-commercial)** so we have been able to talk to who we want and research what we want whilst we have had little or no contribution from the owners of the business...Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio. However the contribution of others (like Joe Long, Jean Thomas and Eddie Rambeau) from the past who openly contribute their time and information has broadened the fan clubs perspective to sound-alike, associated or 'connected' artists and led to the discovery of music we never knew about

As Theberge remarks....”**For both stars and fans, the Internet-based fan club offers a degree of access that is, without doubt, unprecedented in the history of fan culture. It offers the opportunity to perform their identities and relationships in an ongoing fashion**”

Perhaps we are now the **‘Four Seasons culture’**, a culture based on the voice of Frankie Valli, the songwriting of Bob Gaudio and Bob Crewe and the contribution of each member of the Four Seasons. The revelations from our research have been profound and the perspective on the history of the group significant. The contribution of the various members of the group over the decades has become clearer and more significant

Our research of the story is almost complete in terms of the Four Seasons and Frankie’s best work. The 1970s was for most the final flourish and we will complete documentation of that soon in our Newsletters. But it is amazing how new facts and lost music continue to surface.

What a great night it was when 50 dedicated fans and partners turned up to a preview night of ‘Jersey Boys in London on 1st March 2008 which was the biggest gathering of real UK fans since the 1970s concerts and their verdict seems to be that that they still identify with the group and not just with ‘Jersey Boys’! Although the stunning opening of Jersey Boys in the West-End of London has stimulated everyone’s interest, I have to be honest and say we see things clearly now.

I thought that Opening Night which allowed two long-standing co-ordinators in the group to meet American colleagues and Valli and Gaudio, might prove cathartic to a tenuous relationship, but the sheer frenzy of the event seems to have passed everyone by.



Strangely it was the Radio 2 BBC Show about the story of the group that showed me our identity. Bob Fisher of Acrobat Records captured it perfectly....Four Seasons fans can hold their heads high...”**It was just terribly ‘un-hip’, when they were selling records..... to be a fan,what I feel, and a lot of people probably feel the same way....is the one thing that this show has done is it kinda ‘exonerates’ you and suddenly ‘I wasn’t wrong to dig this group for 40 years’**” Validation perhaps was all it took. Many within the fan group still **‘keep the faith’** and appreciate the contribution made by each and every member of the groups line-up over the years. That is the **‘Four Seasons culture’**. With the endorsement of two former Four Seasons Joe Long and John Paiva, who still help and encourage our research it is clear we should continue to celebrate all of the members contributions...without them Bob and Frankie couldn’t have achieved such a ‘eclectic’ portfolio of music. So we really are **The Four Seasons UK Appreciation Society** and that will be our name from now on. And we will continue to search for the lost tracks and stories that enhance our musical enjoyment and our ‘Four Seasons’ friendships. Ohh! What a year this is for Four Seasons fans. Here’s to today’s ‘fandom’

With thanks to Ray Nichol for rare picture sleeves