



# Timepieces

Four Seasons Stories from the past



## 'On Their Own' - The Four Seasons

**I**t was quite a surprise to find a new CD of the Four Seasons and that there were 17 tracks in existence of the Four Seasons performing without Frankie Valli. But thanks to Piet Hans and a few of his friends in Holland we have what he describes as "what we were promised 23 years late!"

Wanting to know all we could about this 'non-commercial' CD compilation we managed to get an interview with Piet to ask him about the background to this collection.

**Casey:** So what was the reason for this compilation.

**Piet:** Well when we discovered a set of 'roadies' cassette tapes in a car boot sale a few years ago we wondered after the live shows we compiled from them, if anything else was possible. When we looked at what had been released of the group, we found that both the 'Who Loves You' and 'Helicon' albums on CD had not been well mastered by Warner-Curb and Collectors Choice. For example 'Magic Mr Sam' on CD has Gerry Polci's drum beat specifically boosted to a disproportionate level causing the rest of the mix to be suppressed and totally destroying the 'feel' and sound of the original vinyl. And we felt some corrections were needed to the Helicon CD release. With access to new technology it is possible to get higher sampling from vinyl and to re-master the original sound and mix from mint copies of the albums. And with what we found on old cassette tapes it meant we had a CD worth of their music.

**Casey:** But why 'on their own'?.....ie without Valli.



**Piet:** Well, we all remember the Seasons tours of Europe in 1976 and 1977. In 1976 Frankie Valli introduced the group for their 'instrumental' spot and told us all they were going to release an album of instrumentals. That never happened!. Then in 1977 we were told the group would become a NEW Four Seasons as Valli pursued a 'solo' career. That never happened either and by the end of 1977 he and Bob had terminated the group's contracts...(all but Lee Shapiro who became Frankie's 'solo' music director). This despite the groups 'world -wide ' popularity....and the Four Seasons biggest world hit ever!

**Casey:** But would they have made it on their own?

**Piet:** In Europe and Australia/NZ they would as they were very successful working without Valli and had substantial enough hits with 'Silver Star' and 'Down The Hall'.

**Casey:** So what is new in this set.?

**Piet:** As well as good re-masters of their 'solo' work( i.e. without Valli) from the 'Who Loves You' and Helicon album we found 11 tracks that demonstrate the quality of the group both vocally and instrumentally. Tapes research produced 4 instrumentals from 'live' concerts and the rehearsal sessions for the 'Valli' album, a classic 'live' performance of 'Slip Away'...and four demos which we believe were written by Don Ciccone and Lee Shapiro which were recorded on the road in what appears to be a sound check session. We also included the demo of Don Ciccone's lead on 'Who Loves You' which you mention in Chapter 5 of The Rise and Fall of The NEW Four Seasons, and an alternative 'take' of 'Down The Hall'.

**Casey:** Was it a difficult job to do?

**Piet:** The original vinyl was digitised at higher sampling rates than the CD copies which are 16 bit 44khz. Recording vinyl digitally at 16bit rate and 48khz sampling rate .....with 'Long Ago' at 24 bit 96khz, which is not far short of DVD sound quality..... we feel makes these better versions than are available on commercial CD. The tape tracks all had varying degrees of tape hiss and high bass prevalent in 70s tape technology. We did what we could using the latest sound processing plug-ins but tried to retain the analogue feel and ambience in the performances. Of course it wasn't possible to remove all of the tape hiss.

**Casey:** So what does the final CD reveal.?

**Piet:** We knew the groups musical competence from the shows back then. For many of us it was the first time we had ever seen or heard the Four Seasons. We only had the previous albums of the 60s and Motown Seasons to compare but we knew back then this line-up

were good. Valli and Gaudio knew it too and that is why they pushed for the deal with Warner-Curb. Last year's CD of the Bachelors III concert clearly demonstrates the superb skills of the group in the arrangements and performances with Frankie during 1975.

This CD shows that competence and

also their distinctive vocal and instrumental skills. Don and Gerry were excellent vocalists and Lee's arranging skills and John's superb guitar work shine through. But you need to put Frankie Valli's huge talent and vocal uniqueness to one side to appreciate these guys in their own right....and they deserved that. Admittedly he added a lot to the group when they performed together but they also took his performances onto a new level, by the contrasting lead vocals on the other tracks on the two albums of that period. They don't even get credit for their performances of (and contribution to) the hits performed in 'Jersey Boys'. A big omission in my opinion. They deserve the credit. Maybe this will correct the record to some extent.....it may be 23 years too late but better late than never."

Listening to the album you can hear and appreciate what Piet means. The instrumentals are tight and vibrant and although the new songs are not classic compositions, like those of Gaudio/Parker, they stand up pretty well. Don's vocals are excellent. And Bob Gaudio's contribution as arranger, producer and keyboard player on the released tracks lifts the tracks significantly. It was a shame Frankie and Bob didn't believe in the group (and invest in them) as much as the fans did.

As a 70s fan I believe we deserve this set. Perhaps now I don't feel as cheated as I did at the time when Frankie made the group 'redundant'. I doubt however that the group members feel that way.

This CD is a welcome addition to our Four Seasons Sound Library. Thanks to Piet.

