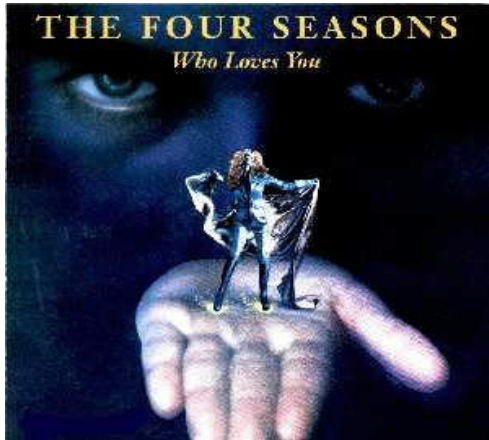


The Rise and Fall of The NEW Four Seasons 1966 to 1977

Chapter 6– December 1976 (Oh! What A Year)



With Mike Curb signing the Four Seasons as an entity in early 1975 to Warner-Curb (Valli-Gaudio-Polci-Shapiro-Ciccone-Long), the 'Who Loves You' track was completed. Frankie Valli had quickly replaced Don Ciccone's lead vocal on the demo and an album was signed up for by Warner-Curb. The group had completed the backing track and demo in the fall of 1974 before Joe Long left the group. Valli hastened his return from England after promoting 'My Eyes Adored You' on The Lulu Show on UK TV because Mike Curb liked Don Ciccone's vocal and wanted to release the track. As for the album, it remained to be seen if Bob Gaudio could come up with a set of songs to match what was clearly going to be a hit. It was a whole new sound. A little known fact is that Don Ciccone wrote the middle section of the song but got no credit for it....and most people don't know that Charles Calello added the final touch. As Charles told us... "It's funny that, in the mid 70's as I did 'My Eyes Adored You' and 'Swearin' To God' with Bob Crewe, and finished the 'Close-Up' album with Bob Gaudio, and on the "sweetening sessions", I also sweetened 'Who Loves You.' I didn't write the strings to that song, I just conducted it; however, it was only Gaudio and I in the studio. "



[Above: clips from the Who Loves You promo video](#)

Lee Shapiro also recalls this contribution by Charlie..."Who Loves You' was my very first recorded string arrangement with a real live orchestra. I was 22 yrs old. Charlie Calello conducted the session due to our tour schedule. Charlie later told me that he had asked Gaudio if he, (ie Charlie), had written the arrangement."....because... "Stylistically, he thought it sounded like his work. Not a note was changed in the final performance. "

"In 2006 I had the pleasure of hanging out with Charlie at the Frankie Valli sessions in NYC for the 'Romancing The '60s', his latest album, where I told him he had been a mentor to me however unknowingly. He was flattered as was I by his comments. He is a master orchestrater. Although Michel Legrand was an



influence....The Umbrellas of Cherbourg is one of my all time favorites. Legrand's arrangements are inspirational. My main influences were Maurice Ravel, Michel Legrand, Thad Jones, Duke Ellington, Herbie Hancock, but my #1 learning experience stylistically was from Charlie Calello.”

The single **'Who Loves You'** went gold, hitting #3 in Billboard on November 15th 1975 as the Four Seasons, (with John Paiva having replaced Joe Long in September 1975) went into the studio to record the album. Rex Woodard in a 1981 Goldmine article said....” **Gaudio fully expected Mike Curb to produce the album. Curb sensed Gaudio had lost a lot of confidence during the Motown years, but realized that Gaudio was the real 'soul' of the group (Valli being the 'sound'). Curb told Gaudio to produce the album and he obliged.”**

Another late 70s article reported that “**the big change was that Bob now had a new lyricist who had a modern and different perspective, Judy Parker. She said of these times...“I met Bob three years ago and, well, I can't really relate to the sense of 'Who Loves You' – the person singing seems really sad, really isolated, and that's not where Bob and I are at all. Bob's writing songs again and we're both very happy; still, though, things come out. The phrase 'Who Loves You' was something Bob just wanted to work with – that's how it started. The first line is always the hardest. Bob usually composes melodies on the piano, then tapes them and we just play them a lot, trying to find a feeling one of us can hash out into words. We like to take a little drive in the car and play the tapes while we drive – that seems to really help. Getting started is always the hardest part. But after that, Bob just takes everything and puts it into perspective. The more he works on a song, the easier it gets”.** Clearly Judy helped Bob's ideas to gel but how much she contributed to the song-writing process has been questioned by some.

The album really was the creation of Bob and the Four Seasons. John Paiva described how the sessions developed.



“**Bob brought in songs which always started on the piano. We developed things from there as a group. They were all simple 3 chord pop songs and we all just played them on to 24 multi-tracks so that the final masters could be mixed to give the track the right instrumental and vocal balance.**

I recall that on 'Silver Star' I played on a rented 12 string guitar. I just played the chord sequence the way I saw it and the final mix brought that out as the feature sound behind Gerry's vocal.” The track is as important for its instrumental arrangement which carries the vocal throughout. That guitar riff, Don's bass and Lee on the piano all give it a unique sound. The addition of horns and synth at key parts just lifts and 'sweetens' it. Frankie wasn't on the track. It would become the first major hit by the group to not feature him. The final mix ran to 6:05secs on the album. This was the new sound of the NEW Four Seasons.

“**Storybook Lovers'** was originally the album opener but was finally moved to the second spot (first issue UK album artwork fea-

tured it still as the opening track). A simple 'laid-back' melody it features the group singing harmony with Valli in the main chorus with a musical arrangement featuring guitars, flutes, piano and strings giving the song a full, warm sound. This extension of the traditional group's harmonies prevalent in this track was a strong feature on the album. It was set for single release upon one occasion.

John Paiva recalls how one of the tracks came together.....**"I recall doing a long solo on a track... 'Harmony, Perfect Harmony' and as I recall on Take 2 I got this solo done really well. It sounded good to me and I was happy with the improvisation and the rising chord sequence. Gerry Polci who was at the mixing board behind the screen dropped his headphones and came running around to say,"Man, that was great.....you sounded just like George Benson". The solo was used but disappointingly for me.....only the first partit was edited for the final master by Bob Gaudio just as the best bit....the rising chord sequence began"**

On **'Emily's Salle De Danse'** John recall's how Bob Gaudio asked him and Lee to just improvise at the end and they thought the **"jammin"** would be simply edited out. But it stayed in as a 2 minute outro. A classic it remains.

'Mystic Mr. Sam' was a piano and Seasons harmony led track featuring Don Ciccone's vocal. It gave the group a chance to develop their own distinctive 'Seasons Sound'. The bluesy brass sets the 'blue-eyed soul' label that critics would give to this album.



But one track stood out and was included almost by accident as Goldmine reported in a 1984 interview with Don Ciccone.....

"Goldmine: The next record, of course, was 'December 1963'. What was the story behind that?"

Don Ciccone: It was a track on the album that followed 'Who Loves You'. It was originally titled 'December 5, 1933'. It was a completely different lyric. I can't be quoted on this, but I think it went "Oh What A Night/Flappers flippin' on the floor/ People hollerin' for more/Pop them corks till your thumb gets sore". Then was the chorus: "Oh why can't they change the colour of that yellow balloon/don't you think it's risin' much too soon". Anyway, Bob Gaudio called a meeting of The Four Seasons and said he had heard through the grapevine that some of us were less than pleased with some of the music we were recording in the studio. He said "Now's the time to speak up because I don't want to be putting down voice and sweetening and have you guys be upset".

Nobody would say anything but everybody had had severe criticisms in the hotel rooms when we were alone, without the 'brass'. Then he got to me and I said to myself, here we go again, I'm the fall guy. But I told him, "Bob, writer-to-writer, I've always been a big fan of your writing, you're a bigger success than I've been, but this tune, 'December 5, 1933' escapes me. Where in the hell



Lee Shapiro's cartoon of John Paiva



are you coming from? It's a song about Prohibition. Kids have been in and out of the drug phase and now they're into healthy foods. What's the concept here?" And he said, "Clothing – '40s type clothing". And I said, "Yeah, but flappers flipping' on the floor? They don't flip, they flap. That's why they're called flappers. Fish flip on the floor. And in the last verse you say "13 years of being dry". Well, it was a 14-year dry era".

There were little discrepancies within the song and it made him realise the song wasn't totally accurate. He got upset that I was bold enough to say anything. But if we had put that song out it would've been ripped to shreds by the critics. That made him angrier and I think he transferred his anger toward me. It separated Bob Gaudio and me; not on my behalf though.

But I remember Frankie saying to him "If you think Don has a good point with the lyrics, let Don take a shot at writing the lyrics". So then

Gaudio said, "Then the song is off the album". Frankie said "We recorded the tracks and I'm telling you those are hit tracks. Why don't you give Don a shot with the lyrics?" Well, by the next morning, Bob had a completely different set of lyrics written with Judy Parker and the rest is history. Without the dissension between Bob and me I don't think the song would've been a hit.

Gerry Polci does the majority of the lead vocal on that and then Frankie comes in for the chorus. I also had some part of the lead. After the argument, I don't think Bob Gaudio wanted to use me at all. He worked with Gerry Polci for three solid days in the studio to get that vocal – there are a great number of splices in that lead vocal that you hear."

'Slip Away' did however provide Don the chance to do a lead vocal. it allowed Don's husky voice to capture all the emotion in the lyric. It was featured 'live' throughout the year's tour and was an audience favourite.

Rex Woodard again takes up the story....."The 'Who Loves You' album blasted away any doubts as to the validity of the Four Seasons comeback; it was superb. The eight Bob Gaudio-Judy Parker compositions were all killers. In a radical departure, Valli only did half the lead vocals, with Ciccone and Polci executing the remainder. Several songs utilized more than one lead, with 'December '63 (Oh What A Night)' employing Polci, Ciccone and Valli. Most contemporary critics awarded the collection rave reviews." It was released in

