



Left; The Four Seasons line-up for most of 1974 clockwise..Frankie Valli, Joe Long, Gerry Polci, Lee Shapiro and Don Ciccone, all in need of a hair make-over!! Photo courtesy of Frank Rovello

in the limelight. He returned from the army, cut a solo album for Buddah (never released) and commenced a successful career recording commercials and doing session work. Valli had no way of knowing so, but Ciccone had been a Four Seasons fan ever since catching them in concert in 1965. The audition was waived; Ciccone joined effective 1 January 1974. The group opened 1974 on 15 January when asked to play at the inauguration of New Jersey's Governor. Ciccone didn't feel familiar enough with the material to perform but Callas agreed to return for the event.

Crewe and Kenny Nolan had penned a delightful number entitled "Hickory" which seemed earmarked for platinum. Recent developments dictated Motown would contribute minimum promotion, but Crewe felt "Hickory" would sell itself if the Seasons covered it. Crewe commemorated the "Hickory/Charisma" recording sessions by reuniting the original team that placed the Seasons in the number one position before the Beatles arrived. Calello, a member of the Four Seasons briefly in 1958 and again in 1965, and who did all those fabulous arrangements on Vee Jay and Philips, returned. (*Calello*

had temporarily left his religious group for the occasion) So did Nick Massi, the original bassist between 1960 and 1965. Valli sang lead, with background vocals provided by Massi, Crewe (also pounding on a tambourine), Gaudio, Long and no telling who else. The song turned out very nicely. Valli's falsettos were sharp and Massi's bass notes (particularly on "Charisma") touched many a nostalgic old fan.

"Hickory" received respectable airplay in several markets, and pierced the top 100 in most national surveys. It got no promotion, as feared. Still, it seemed a step in the right direction. Crewe asked Motown to release "My Eyes Adored You" also a Crewe/Nolan composition, as a follow-up. Motown refused. It was the final straw. It was time to move on.

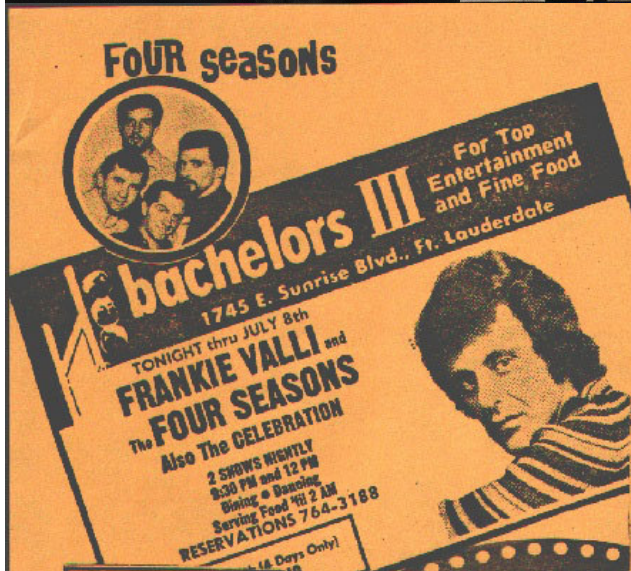
To strengthen the stage act which continued to tour very successfully, the group added a guitarist to the back-up band, John Paiva. He could be spotted back in the shadows beginning 6 May 1974." By then the group had left Motown and had no record company.

John recalls how he was recruited in his biography....."After one particular show, we (The Happenings) finished our last song and as we were taking our final bows to an uninterested audience a tall smiling football player type came gangling up the isle with his hand out wishing me well and loading me up with compliments. Gerry Polci was his name. He told me that he was a member of "The Four Seasons" and that they were playing at the Melody Tent nearby. Again he said how much he enjoyed my playing. Fine and good night. Gerry did give me his phone number and soon I found myself contacting him. That's when I became impressed. He was forever returning from or off to some neat place I had never seen. This all sounded grand. No promises were ever made but one day I did get called. Would I be interested in a possible gig with the group as second guitarist. Swell with me, so I took a cut in pay and joined up.

The call for the Seasons gig was unusual. My first notice that there might be something possible, came from Gerry, saying someone would contact me soon. Joe Labraccio who was then the bassist and bass singer called. We met at his apartment in New Jersey not far from my place in North Plainfield. During the meeting I began to get the feeling that the opening was more for a roadie than a second guitarist. I was adamant that I had no interest in setting up equipment. Joe claimed that although I would be traveling with Duke in the van rather than flying, I would not be expected to handle equipment. That turned out to be bullshit. After traveling with and becoming good friends with Duke, it became uncomfortable to just sit there. I felt obligated to pitch in and soon found myself jerking gear around the country as a glorified roadie. This was not to my taste!" Nor did it help a bad back!



Frankie and Mary Ann: Photos courtesy of John Paiva



Valli's temperament improved too no end when wedding bells chimed for him and Mary Ann Hannagan on 29 June 1974. Mary Ann, a 25 year old model, befriended Valli earlier at a time when the world seemed to be crashing in on his head. They held a brief ceremony in Las Vegas with Gaudio standing as best man.

Mid 1974 was to also become the New Four Seasons peak. With Joe, Lee, Don and Gerry, and John Paiva in the backing band, Frankie Valli had the best ever set of musician's working with him.

This is best exemplified in the concerts at Bachelor's 3 -Fort Lauderdale in June 1974. For years the shows had contained a masterful mixture of the oldies hits plus contemporary songs done in innovative arrangements which maintained the groups connection with the newer fans and emerging audiences whilst still being true to the 'roots' music created by the 'original'

Four Seasons back in the 60s. Many of these contemporary songs had been around since the early 70s like, 'I Got Love', which Charles Calello had arranged for them.....and their awesome medley of 'Bridge Over Troubled Water/ Long and Winding Road/McArthur Park'. But with Lee Shapiro's developing skills other new material was added. 'You Are The Sunshine Of My Life', the Stevie Wonder classic was given a harmony style and Frankie's voice was allowed to soar on Paul McCartney's 'My Love' and the contemporary classics, 'Memories/All In Love Is Fair (Medley)' and David Gates 'If', also showed Lee's arranging talents'. The group also flexed their musical talents and as well as a fast paced version of 'If I Were A Carpenter' they did an instrumental spot featuring Barry White's 'Love Theme. At no other stage in the history of the Four Seasons did the group perform a show with so many un-recorded tracks nor deliver such a versatile and diverse show. None of these songs were ever recorded in the studio. The sound was clearly improved with John Paiva as part of the backing band and his guitar solo's were a feature of their sound with him being introduced by Frankie Valli as ...'My Main Man! John Paiva'. The backing of The Memphis Horns also showed what a full Four Seasons Orchestra could achieve.

Rex Woodard again takes up the story in mid 1974...."The group decided to leave Motown. Berry Gordy's intentions were honourable when he signed the boys but shortly thereafter he discovered movie making and apparently lost interest in making records. Motown never paid royalties to the group. It found promotion difficult since the whole company structure was centered on black enterprise and thus unequipped for dealing with the white market. Vee Jay had been the same but the industry had been different in those days. Valli tried to buy from Motown the unreleased album tracks but their price was too high. He ended up taking just the master of "My Eyes Adored You" for \$4,000." A copy remains in the Motown vault.

Attempts to take other songs failed but Crewe, Gaudio and Nolan were still contracted to Jobete (Motown's music publishing company) and several subsequent recordings would show these publishing credentials although it is apparent that none of them was recorded whilst at Motown. However the master of 'My Eyes Adored You' was. Crewe and Valli hustled "Eyes" to Capital, Atlantic, Tom Cat and other labels but no one bit." As Charles Calello recalls, "The Seasons had a bad run at Motown and not a label in the states was interested in them. 32 labels passed on "My Eye's Adored You" when Bob Gaudio, Frankie Valli and Bob Crewe tried to sell it.". Rex again..."They finally found a taker in Larry Uttal, former president of Bell Records. Uttal almost signed the original Four Seasons back in 1960 and regretted his lack of foresight later. Uttal had just formed a new independent label, Private Stock, and



needed artists. He could hear potential in "My Eyes Adored You" and really believed he could break it big. Unfortunately, his belief extended only to that particular record. He did not want to place the Four Seasons under contract, only Valli individually. This was still a workable arrangement, at least the song would get released, and the group's value could later rise in proportion to Valli's own fortunes." Charles Calello recalls..."Bob Crewe's engineer Roy Cicalla remixed the track at the Sound Studio in LA ". Valli signed to Private Stock in October 1974 and the song was their first release.

"My Eyes Adored You" in the UK made good progress. Released in October 74. reaching #5 by February 1975. (Valli's first UK chart entry since 1971 with 'The Proud One' at #48) It entered the Billboard 'Bubbling Under' chart on 16 November 1974 at No 103. " And began slowly climbing the charts.

But over in the UK something from the past was emerging to ensure the resurgence of the group was assured as Ken

Charmer documents.....

"Back in the UK the Northern Soul scene was to become a phenomena that was irresistible and with it the Seasons resurgence. In a small town in Lancashire at 2.00 am on 23 September 1973 Wigan Casino opened its doors to 1,500 underground music fanatics. The DJ's, staff and enthusiasts would create a monster which grew and grew and became an institution for thousands of youngsters. The Casino legend not only influenced the national pop charts but spawned its own record label and magazine. By 1977 it would be voted by Billboard the worlds best disco beating among others the then trendy Studio 54 in New York. Kev Roberts, one of the clubs early DJ's, held the Seasons in high esteem!!! "The Seasons had become popular at the 'Twisted Wheel', Manchester in 1969. I'll always remember starting my first ever session at Wigan Casino on 30 September 1973 with 'I'm Gonna Change'. Everybody loved this track and it was regularly featured but this popularity was to grow in the years that followed culminating in their most famous Northern Soul track".

In England Northern Soul became the dominant club sound. In Wigan's Casino the reputations of the DJ's, in particular Russ Winstanley and Richard Searling, were escalating and the all-nighters were playing, for many people's money the rarest and best-quality Northern Soul sounds anywhere in the UK. The Northern scene record hunters were turning up totally obscure American singles, little known B-sides, unknown British releases and stunning album tracks with great regularity. Russ comments on how he 'broke' the Seasons on the Northern Soul scene. "Another Casino related 'hit' was by an already established artist Frankie Valli. Together with the Four Seasons he cut 'The Night' with the Motown linked label Mowest. Russ picked up on the recording and it went down a storm at the Casino. From the opening bass guitar to its storming conclusion, it was hugely popular." As a result of the Northern Soul interest, Mowest issued 'The Night' and it stormed up the charts in Spring 1975. Demand had built up throughout 1974 and The Four Seasons took the dance floors by storm, confirming their cult following and the respect soul fans had for the group. Reissued on Mowest 3024 during Feb 1975, sales were sufficient to see 'The Night' enter the UK Pop charts on 19 April where it would stay for 9 weeks and peak at number 7 on 16th May. Success at last from the 'Chameleon' album after 3 years!

All this activity in the US and UK charts caused a reaction.....back in the USA.....

"The big name rock chroniclers awoke from their slumber about this time and began taking notice of this simple ditty by the "former lead singer" of the famous Four Seasons. Uttal can be credited with one of the best, most persistent promotion efforts of all time. "My Eyes..." only jumped three or four notches a week, but Uttal kept plugging away.



Dutch autographed pic sleeve

"Valli continued to perform the track in concert throughout the latter half of 1974 ." recalls Rex Woodard.

Finally, on 22 March 1975 Billboard proclaimed "My Eyes Adored You" as the nation's number one record after almost six months from its release!

"Swearin' To God", a Bob Crewe/Denny Randell song, was released and debuted in May 75. It sold 317,625 copies in its first 10 days on the street. In the UK it was released the same month making #31 in June.

But there was a change coming. Frankie Valli in a UK interview in early 1975 knew there was better to come when asked about the Group he said "I have a monster that I am holding back until the summer, its going to be a number 1"

Word circulated fast that the Four Seasons were unsigned and available. As predicted, every label in the country wanted the group. To whet their appetite, Gaudio would let them hear a song recorded while at Motown but

never under their ownership! "Who Loves You". But not with Valli singing it. The demo recorded by Gaudio featured Don Ciccone on lead vocal. "with the patented Seasons harmony soaring in the background. The song had disco appeal but made the best disco music in the land seem wimpy in comparison." says Rex Woodard. Gaudio maintains however that he never wrote it as a disco song.

The beginning of 1975 should have been a settled and steady time for the group. But even when musically they were at their best, internal pressures and external influences came into play. Of course, such internal pressures have affected every major pop group in the past 50 years: consider the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who, just for starters. "I think it's outside influences that are always circling a group," Gaudio says of these times. When the decision was made by Frankie and Bob that Joe Long should be 'retired' from the group in 1975 there were a number of reasons quoted in interviews and anecdotal information. One was that he was having problems hitting bass notes due to his early 60s hand injury. Another was that he wanted to be made a partner with Bob and Frankie. And a third was that he was dropped because a younger image was required.....this it has been suggested was due to Mary Anne's influence. However if that was the case Bob Gaudio must have gone along with the idea, which is a surprise. Maybe Frankie supports this reason in a recent interview when he says..."We've all been influenced by people we've been with. And that's unfortunate, sometimes." Frankie Valli told David Gritten Telegraph March 2008 In examining these reasons, the first has been discounted by John Paiva who would have noticed if Joe had any trouble hitting notes and the second by Joe himself in interview with Stuart Miller.. That leaves the third which was supported by an article from 1974 around the time Frankie and Marry Anne married. In it he described her as a very intelligent woman who liked to discuss the business with him. He said he always took her opinion into account in considering his business interests. A quote in 1979 said she was Frankie's "'sounding board' for all the major decisions in my life". But this is conjecture and maybe it was all to do with the ambitions of the new group members and Bob and Frankie had to listen?

Whatever the reason it was one not welcomed by the fans. Many deserted the US fan club and the group lost a large chunk of talent and personality on stage from which they would never recover. One UK fan Malcolm Grace captured what Joe was all about "Without doubt my favourite Season is Joe Long. I have often thought I would like to tell him so and that after all these years, how a small event explains why..... "The first time I saw the Seasons was at the Hammersmith Odeon in 1971. I took a friend of a girl I was trying to take out. After the show Tina suggested going round to the Stage Door and trying to get Frankie's autograph. There were about 30 of us. We got a resounding "Get Lost" by the staff and most left. There were about 6 of us when Bob Grimm came through and told us there was a reception on the front upstairs foyer. "Go On Up." Yeah Right! Anyway we did and huddled around the top of the staircase. It was Joe who saw us first and he beckoned us over but we all froze. Then he walked over and said "Come on in as **My** Guests" and asked a waitress to give us some drinks and food. He no-