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Concert review:

Four Freshmen join Pops orchestra in dreamlike collaboration

The show Sunday at the Miller Center for the Arts features beautiful love songs and lush arrangements.

SUNDAY JANUARY 27, 2019 07:30 PM

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A concert by the Four Freshmen with the Reading Pops Orchestra is like soaking in a warm bath and being presented with a bouquet of fragrant roses.

You're floating in a dream world of some of the world's most beautiful love songs, with romantic lyrics, sung by four perfectly matched male voices in close harmony, over lush arrangements.

On Sunday afternoon at the Miller Center for the Arts, the Pops, led by Willis Rapp, celebrated the opening of their 50th season with their third collaboration with the Freshmen, who are celebrating 70 years of that distinctive vocal sound, featuring their 25th incarnation.

Bass vocalist and drummer Bob Ferreira, it was pointed out, has been with the quartet the longest — 26 years — which also happens to be the age of the youngest and newest member, baritone and trumpeter Jon Gaines. Their other two mates are lead tenor and electric bassist Tommy Boynton and second tenor and electric guitarist Stein Malvey.

Like the original Freshmen, who created the sound based on barbershop singing and Stan Kenton's trombone section, **these four are both top-notch instrumentalists and honey-voiced vocalists.** They sang some of the original quartet's arrangements, and added many examples of their more recent work, including two brand-new orchestral arrangements that had their premieres Sunday. The latter were "Day by Day," which opened the program, and "Come Fly With Me," commissioned for Frank Sinatra's 100th birthday, played near the end.

With only a few exceptions, **Gaines performed on a flugelhorn, producing a delicious tone on every solo**, and only broke out the trumpet for the more uptempo "Day In, Day Out," played without the Pops, which the original Freshmen played with the Stan Kenton Band.

Malvey was featured as a guitar soloist on two arrangements of songs by the Brazilian composer Carlos Antonio Jobim: "So Danco Samba" and the iconic bossa nova "Girl From Ipanema," sung in English and Portuguese. **The Freshmen's mellow vocals were a good fit for Brazilian jazz.**

They paid tribute to the original Freshmen (Bob Flanigan, Ross and Don Barbour, and Hal Kratzsch) by singing some of the very earliest hits: the soft Latin "Poinciana" and "It's a Blue World," with **lovely orchestral arrangements** behind them.

They dug deep into the American Songbook with **excellent renditions** of "It Could Happen to You," "Fools Rush In," "Laura," "A Nightingale Sang in Old Berkeley Square," "It's All Right With Me," "Stardust," "Nancy," a swinging "You Made Me Love You," an uptempo "There Will Never Be Another You" (minus the Pops), "How Can I Tell Her?," and "My One and Only Love."

They finished with "The Day Isn't Long Enough," as an encore for the **blissed-out audience.**