



THE 4GENTS 'OUTPERFORM' IN PRESCOTT - DAVID STRINGER, PUBLISHER

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Fans of Doo-Wop were in for a special afternoon at the Elks Theatre's Sunday show by The 4Gents, who specialize in covers of the Four Seasons and top hits of the 50's and 60's. The Elks Theater books many tribute shows which are popular with Prescott's large retiree population who remember the Golden Age of Rock and Roll. But at Sunday's matinee at the Elks, the 4Gents outperformed the usual nostalgia fare and gave us a sensational hit parade of Doo-Wop classics.

The 4Gents is an Arizona-based vocal ensemble that has been active since 2015. The members are all professionally trained musicians who are also educators associated with the Tucson School District's (TUSD) special program for the arts known as OMA—Opening Minds Thru the Arts. The group's founder, Matthew Holter is a music teacher for TUSD. Dr. Greg Guenther, is a classically trained singer who has performed on the opera stage and is on the music faculty of Pima Community College. Juan Aguirre is a classically trained baritone who has performed with the Arizona Opera. Jose 'Chach' Snook, is a former Teacher of The Year who began his career with the New York based vocal ensemble, Pieces of Eight. All of these talented gentlemen demonstrated their love for pop music and brought great flair to the Doo-Wop classics of the 50's and 60's.

Doo-Wop as a musical genre has its origins in the jazz and rhythm and blues of the late 1940's and early 50's. Groups such as the Ink Spots (I'll Never Smile Again--1948, Ebb Tide--1953) and the Mills Brothers (Paper Doll--1943, Lazy River--1952) scored major hits featuring a distinctive form of close, four part harmony, often with a lead singer.

Beginning in the mid 1950's in the urban areas of the East Coast, young blacks and later Italians began to develop a more syncopated rhythmic style with distinct musical parts ranging from bass to falsetto that were sung 'a cappella', i.e. without music. Since these young people were not musically trained and did not have instruments, they improvised nonsense syllables such as "doo-wop", "doo-wah", and "sha na na" to mimic the sound of musical instruments.

By the mid 1950's, groups like The Orioles ("Crying in the Chapel", 1953), the Crew Cuts ("Sh-Boom, Sh-Boom", 1954) and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers ("Why Do Fools Fall In Love", 1956), were hitting the pop charts. Italian American groups like Dion and the Belmonts and Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons soon followed and made Doo-Wop an immensely popular and distinctively American musical genre.

In their Sunday matinee show, the 4Gents treated us to a 25 song playlist that spanned the 1950's and 60's era of Doo-Wop. In a bow to

music history, they opened the show with “Blue Moon”, a 1961 hit by the Marcells, which was actually a Doo-Wop cover of a Rogers and Hart song from 1934. Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons were well represented with “Sherry” and “Walk Like a Man”.

Greg Guenther’s rendition of Dion and the Belmonts 1961 hit, “The Wanderer”, was a show stopper. The entire show was seeded with Doo-Wop gems by half-forgotten groups like the Diamond’s 1957 hit, “Little Darlin’”, the Drifter’s “Under The Boardwalk” from 1964, the Coaster’s 1958 hit, “Yakety Yak”, and Ben E. King's Sam Cooke-inspired classic from 1961, “Stand By Me”.

The second half of the show featured several Beach Boy classics including “Barbara Ann”, “California Girls” and “I Get Around”. Although not exactly Doo-Wop, the close harmonies and vocal parts of the Beach Boys sound are clearly inspired by the earlier tradition. All in all, the 4Gents show was a wonderful afternoon of nostalgia, music history and entertainment.