

# Four Tops Singer Says Group is Like Family

By Karen L. Peiffer

More than happy to submit to a personal interview vocalist Lawrence Payton of the Four Tops smiled broadly and patted the bar stool beside him in the lounge of the Holiday Inn in Mechanicsburg.

Originally known as the Four Aims the members of the group quickly changed their name at their agent's behest due to the name of pre-existing musical group the Ames Brothers. Payton said the name change was an easy adjustment to make because they have and always will aim for the Top.

In 1962 the Four Tops released an album entitled *Jazz Impressions* under Berry Gordy's former jazz label, Workshop. Today, a copy of the album in near-mint-condition sells for more than \$60.00.

Payton is well aware of the inflated price and said it was a great album they recorded in a ballroom which provided a natural echo throughout the music.

On the back cover of their album *Four Tops Live!* is a photograph of the

group performing in front of yet another exuberant crowd only this time at the Roostertail in Detroit. "I still hang out there," Payton said.

The club is situated beside the Detroit River and provides a bird's eye view of the annual hydroplane boat races. The spray of water which extends from behind a speeding boat is referred to as its roostertail; hence, the name of the nightclub.

At the pinnacle of their success in 1968 the Four Tops lost their prolific songwriting/producing team Holland-Dozier-Holland. Payton said the team left Motown over money disputes and a consequential conflict with Berry Gordy.

By 1972 the Four Tops had also left Motown. "We felt we weren't getting the exposure we needed," said Payton. "He [Berry Gordy] had so many great acts that he couldn't concentrate entirely on just one," Payton said.

Even though the Four Tops became lost in the shuffle at Motown, Payton said the group was treated well.

All was not lost when the songwriting team left Motown,

however, because Lamont Dozier returned in 1988 to provide his expertise in rhythm arrangements on their new album *Indestructible*.

The song entitled "Loco in Acapulco" from the motion picture soundtrack of "Buster" is currently number one in Europe, Payton said. With professionals in the music business such as Smokey Robinson, Phil Collins, Huey Lewis, Aretha Franklin, and Kenny G all lending assistance in the production of the album how could it be anything less than a great success?

To whom or to what do the Four Tops attribute their 35 years of success?

"We are more like family," Payton said. "We were not created by a record company."

Stage manager Cory Heath said they fight just like spouses in a marriage. "They have it out but come back the next day as buddies," Heath said.

Bass player Gregory Coles said, "They've been married longer to each other than they have to their wives." Coles attributes the Four Tops' success to the love and respect they have for each

other.

In this day and age of musicians coming and going from group to group almost as often as babies change diapers it was comforting to hear the exact same voices projected across the stage at The Forum. The Four Tops boast proudly of retaining their original line-up.

"We wanted to make this our life's work," Payton said. "We went into this together and we wanted to make it together," he said.

Payton, looking back over the years, could not recall any one particularly critical moment in their careers during which time he felt the band may not continue. The Four Tops simply stuck it out through thick and thin, and today can reap the rewards from their perseverance. "Actually, it has been so good nobody wants to quit," Payton said.

The love and devotion Payton has for his fellow band members was quite evident throughout the interview.

"They are more than brothers to me," Payton said. "These guys are my life."

## WPSH Top 20

For the Week of February 13

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. R.E.M.<br>"Stand"  | 11. Cheap Trick<br>"Don't Be Cruel"                    |
| 2. Bangles<br>"In Your Room"                                  | 12. U2<br>"I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" |
| 3. Skinny Puppy<br>"Texture"                                  | 13. Siouxsie & the Banshees<br>"Peek-A-Boo"            |
| 4. Duran Duran<br>"All She Wants"                             | 14. Marc Almond<br>"The Stars We Are"                  |
| 5. Westworld<br>"Sonic Boom Boy"                              | 15. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young<br>"Got It Made"    |
| 6. Kylie Minogue<br>"Locomotion"                              | 16. R.E.M.<br>"Orange Crush"                           |
| 7. Information Society<br>"What's On Your Mind (Pure Energy)" | 17. Primitives<br>"Way Behind Me"                      |
| 8. Candi<br>"Dancing Under A Latin Moon"                      | 18. Duran Duran<br>"I Don't Want Your Love"            |
| 9. Bobby Brown<br>"Don't Be Cruel"                            | 19. Guns-N-Roses<br>"Paradise City"                    |
| 10. George Michael<br>"Faith"                                 | 20. Midnight Oil<br>"Beds Are Burning"                 |

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