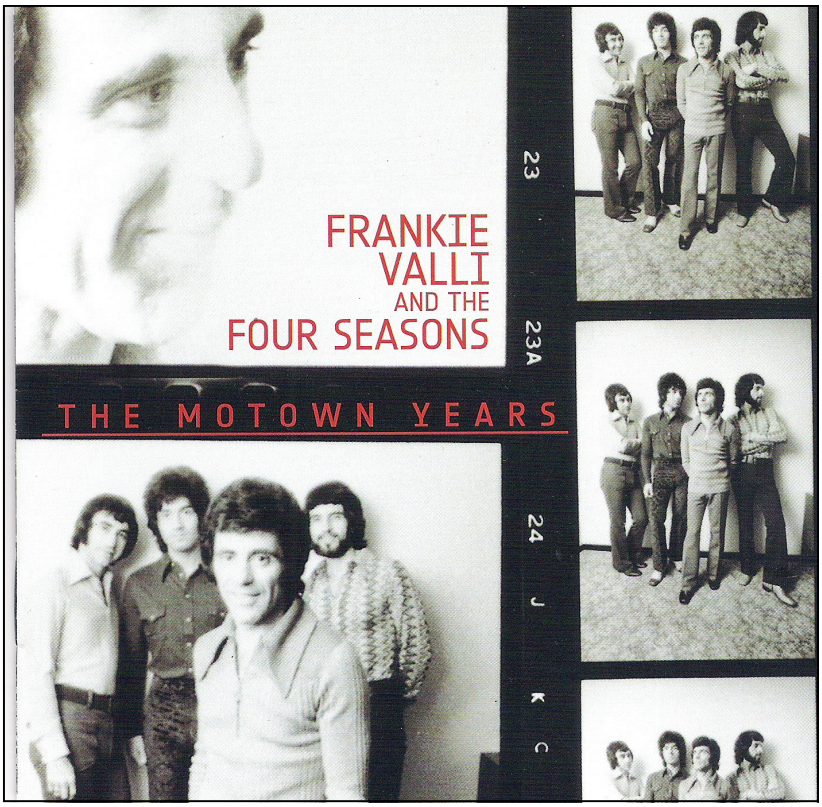


Chameleon's 4 Seasons Comment

It seems that Lynn Boleyn's appeal on Chameleon's blog back at the end of December worked a treat with the release by Motown Universal of "Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons - 'The Motown Years" on Hip-O-Select.

When I spoke to Harry Weinger a few years ago in an earlier attempt to persuade Motown to release this set he made it clear that it was down to him to speak to Bob Gaudio and make a deal. And when Peter Bennett, the Partnership lawyer wrote to us in March 2006 to say of the plan then to include unreleased tracks**…."The release of 30 year old "unfinished" test tracks that we believe are not even owned by the record company proposing to release them, does not further our plans for Frankie to capitalize on the success of Jersey Boys and the related interest in him."**….it seemed an agreement on a Motown release was very remote.

Well now it has happened and it is with much gratitude to Harry's persistence and Peter's recognition that this was good business, that we are now able to review the last part of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons vinyl collection to appear on CD.

This is no ordinary release/re-issue though. For a start there is 'supposedly' nothing new! Harry Weinger says of the release now…***As for unreleased tracks, there may be some tracks which were worked up, or tracks voiced by FV for demo purposes, but in no way were they slated for, or finished for, release. I respect that."***

Well, I'll get to that soon. Overall….this release is a masterpiece. It oozes quality. Sonically it is different to anything we have heard before from this period... The sound stage for me, is superbly set out by Ellen Fitton at Universal Mastering Studios – East. The re-mastering of the original tapes gives us each instrument in its place from right to left on the sound stage and the separation allows each element to be heard and appreciated. This is particularly noticeable with the masterful arrangements on 'Chameleon'. After the opening 'wall of harmony' of the 'Prelude' to 'A New Beginning ', 'Sun Country' is very much the 'sum of so many good parts' that I just described ….each distinctive and separate. Frankie Valli's vocal is somewhat withdrawn in the mix and as a result more effective as the music interacts with his lead and the Seasons harmony. This doesn't happen so well on the vinyl or anything mixed since its original release. It may not be to everyone's taste but I love it.

The rest of the first CD enhances the style and feel of **'Chameleon'** so well in this re-mixed form. For me listening to it was like a hot bath. You could 'soak' in the familiar sound of long loved songs….just a little sharper…..like a brand new fragrant 'bath salt'!

'Walk On, Don't Look Back' breaks the mood somewhat, but reminds us of the 'Corporation's" belief in the group's original sound and is available at last in pristine condition (The bootleg version had some distortion from the vinyl)



and the version of '**Life and Breath'** has the spoken intro restored as on the original UK single whilst 'Hickory' has all the detail of Charles Calello's arrangement revealed.

But it is the 'unedited' version of 'Charisma' that is for me, the star track. The added minute has the Seasons chanted harmony continue whilst Frankie Valli's falsetto soars above them. A quite stunning track.

Disc 2 by comparison is somewhat disappointing being the **'Inside You'** album and including tracks by the Four Seasons so labeling it 'Frankie Valli' was as wrong as the original hastily assembled release back in 1975. Back then when the group had left the 'label' it was a blatant and little promoted attempt to cash in on the success of '**Who Loves You'** and '**The Night'** (re-issue UK). But it is entirely enjoyable and not without it's surprises with a totally new version of **'Listen to Yesterday'**. An opening, with the sound of waves crashing on the shore leads into the group backing (presumably the Four Seasons… but perhaps lacking something in the voices) compared to the female backing on the original single. Valli's vocal is also less prominent. You have to hear both to see why the single version was selected for the original vinyl release….but with more familiarity this version may prove most people's favourite.

Although this is not an Anthology of the group's period at Motown, it is entirely apt for the released material from those days to be assembled as this portrays what the group was to the record buying public of the day…and it does contain tracks that had some element of success on the charts. But it is not the whole picture of their work. The second released album from the years at Motown **'Inside You'** was in 1975 after they had left the label and it was an album of unreleased tracks which Bob and Frankie had nothing to do with. It was released without their permission. So unreleased tracks have escaped before!! But now the Partnership is back in control of their tracks and they have elected not to release anything else new from the vaults.

But what about these unreleased tracks? With over 50 tracks sitting in the vault it is too valuable an asset for both Motown Universal and the Partnership to not, at some stage consider. The comment from the Partnership that the unreleased are **'incomplete demos'** is of course not true as we know that many are complete, as illustrated on **'Inside You'**....and it would not be Bob Gaudio or Bob Crewe's practice to **not** complete things to the quality that shines through on every other track in this compilation. It seems likely this is something which at some time they will seek to cash in on. Particularly as 'Jersey Boys' continues to raise the profile of the group and interest in their 'products'. Business is business……and I have no doubt they may try again in the future. But if not I don't think we will complain too much. However it is disappointing that the sleeve notes are not historically orientated and gloss over many aspects of their tenure at Motown but then the negative aspect of Motown's management had to be 'forgotten' by Universal now. However, the lack of dates of recording sessions which helps 'completists' like us is unfortunate. The bootleg CD and our archives remains the best source of such data. We have this info from the Philips era and many Motown projects do provide it (like Cellarful of Motown Vols 1 to 3). Cost saving by the label we assume.. But we have the music and thank everyone's efforts in providing this release….and to Bob Gaudio for answering Lynn's prayer. Now we have so little to complain about, what will we write about? Somehow something always turns up!! Chameleon. **Catch the detailed story of part of the Motown years in The Rise and Fall Of the NEW Four Seasons 1965—1977 Chapter 5...soon!**

Motown's hidden vault…...a no-go area for Seasons fans!



The Fans Verdict!

We've trawled around the Appreciation Society for fan's views on this epic release and here are the responses…..

First from Eric Charge who is also a huge fan of all Motwon artists at the e-group '**Motown Treasures'…….**
"I didn't think we'd be treated to an official release of the collected Motown recordings of Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons on CD, so it's a dream come true to finally hold the precious thing in my hands. Forget the bootleg version released a few years ago, the lovely Ellen Fitton has remastered everything from the original tapes and helped reveal a lost masterpiece. I am referring to the group's CHAMELEON album. Perhaps the record was too far advanced for 1972, but it sounds perfect for 2008. I can't help comparing it with Beach Boys records of similar vintage and I have to say the West Coast guys were putting out very patchy stuff. CHAMELEON is a joy from start to finish with enormous production values, heavenly background vocals, and Frankie Valli in top form. Talking of backing vocals, I'd love to know who the gospel choir on POOR FOOL are – presumably one of Motown's great groups of the day.

The liner notes don't mention that the wonderful YOU'RE A SONG (THAT I CAN'T SING) was the first 45 release in the UK (or that it was somehow skipped over for the US) and I can honestly say that each and every album track could have made a great 45. What were they thinking of back in 1972 not to make ANY of them an A-side in the States?
The first CD of the set follows this genius album with another half a dozen tracks, including two non-Bob Crewe productions. Back in 1973, I really loved WALK ON, DON'T LOOK BACK and that faux-retro sound, with Frankie reprising his stunning falsetto. This mix of the song is the cleanest I've ever heard, with that attractive galloping percussive effect for the latter part of the song. Hal Davis produced Frankie's stunning version of George Clinton's LIFE AND BREATH, which has to be my favourite Frankie Valli Motown solo recording, alongside the superb INSIDE YOU.

Over on disc 2, other Motown producers were in the chair for Frankie's cover versions of Brenda Holloway's JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE and the Four Tops' BABY I NEED YOUR LOVING, both of which ought to please Motown fans.

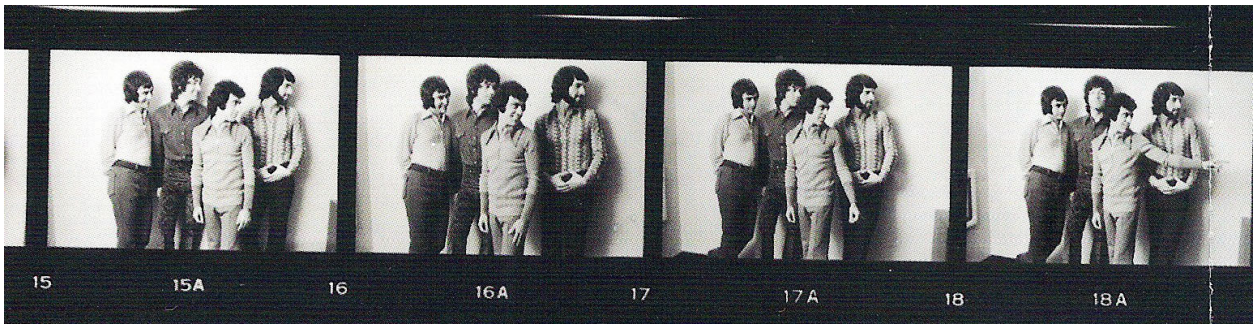
The liner notes by Brian Chin are pretty brief but there is an explanation for the duplication of various tracks, Several reprises of songs from CHAMELEON and later singles can be heard" on the album INSIDE YOU "with major and minor tweaks: a longer fade on HICKORY, an adjusted string section on LOVE ISN'T HERE, and more notably, the return of the intro monologue on LIFE AND BREATH and the Valli led mix of THE NIGHT."



Well, to my ears, there isn't a dud track here. It's so highly recommended, you'll need an oxygen tank!"

And from our "Other Boleyn Girl" Lynn ….

"As one of my favourite era's I really love this CD which includes two of my all time favourites, You're A song (That I Can't Sing) and Walk On, Don't Look Back. It's great to have these on CD and this has been playing constantly and rather loudly in my car while I have been driving around with the roof off .... just trying to get this great sound out to as many people as possible in the Midlands! It was very disappointing that this CD was not available in the UK on its release - another lost opportunity - but I would like to thank Johnny Hornsby in the USA for arranging to send me



copies of the CD to distribute to the fans here in the UK. Good to see the CD now available from UK outlets. (August 18th)

Frankie's voice is just perfection and the Four Seasons harmonies are breathtaking - just listen to the unedited version of Charisma - the ending is really wonderful. I just love the spoken start of "Life And Breath" - just how beautiful is that .... "If you believe in love enough then love will never die". It sent shivers down my spine the first time I heard it. So who is the guy with the golden voice? Pity he wont be at the Convention in October?!

Although it was a little disappointing there were no previously unreleased tracks from this 'lost' era perhaps this could be the start of something. It was sad that the group were not promoted as they should have been by Motown but better late than never - the Motown era should have been one of the group's biggest and perhaps it still can be. With renewed interest in the group following the success of Jersey Boys the time could not be better to get these songs out there to all fans worldwide. This CD has certainly reminded me just how great the group were then and I do hope that Bob and Frankie along with Harry Weinger will now consider another release to include some of those unreleased gems from the Motown archives like 'One Man'.

But John Riley , former 70s committee member has some misgivings…..

"Towards the end of the Philips era there was a good deal of experimentation and the group's music became much more sophisticated and mature. This quality was carried through into the Motown era and although commercial success at the time proved elusive, this was one of the most creative and stimulating periods in the Four Seasons catalogue.

This double album gives us all the material released by Motown, plus the bonus of some variation on the originals. The unedited versions of Charisma and Listen To Yesterday are splendid and the latter in particular is lifted to a new level by the tremendous final section. It's Listen To Yesterday that does it for me.

If there is any defect at all with this set it is in terms of sound quality. At the time Chameleon was released Bob Gaudio commented that he had a dreadful time trying to get what he had on tape onto record because of the limitations of vinyl. The vinyl album is actually pretty good, so he got it well enough, but here on CD we should have all that quality and more.

We do have the extraordinary detail of CD and some things are audible for the first time. But in some way this recording quality is the second level, not up with the very best. It feels compressed and slightly metallic. This won't worry us in the car or on the iPod, but it does worry me on high-end HiFi of the traditional sort. It's not quite there. Nearly, but not quite. Still, let's not be churlish! It's been released and in almost every respect it's splendid!"

