



The Flirtations (L to R); Aurelio Font, Jon Arterton, Jimmy Rutland, Cliff Townsend (Absent: Michael Callen)

bucket-of-cold-water kind of experience." The others agreed with this assessment, again identifying the anger that appears when a family member is seriously ill. "You know", said Cliff, "It's kind of like, if Michael had his shit together, we wouldn't have to be doing this." Aurelio talked about their anger, "Yeah . . . you're angry at the person who gets ill, too. 'Snap out of it!'" "How dare you be ill!" added Cliff. Jon quietly added, "We don't mind if you die, as long as it doesn't inconvenience us."

All of the Flirts agreed that they want to continue to perform because they consider their work to be valuable. "This is what we give to our own lesbian and gay, bisexual community", said Aurelio, "and what we can give out to the straight community is just too important to let anything stop us."

The Flirts are unique. Another male acappella group, the Nylons, has been supportive of their efforts. Comparisons? Jimmy quipped, "The main difference is we're openly gay and they're Canadian." The Flirts talk to their audience in a way that other groups don't. They like the house lights up during a performance so that they can cruise the audience. "We flirt shamelessly," Jon offered. Amid the laughter Aurelio added that they talk to the audience, revealing little parts of their own lives that flesh out the image of what it's like to be a gay male in the 90's. Something else that

distinguishes the Flirts from other entertainers, in Cliff's view, is that "We actually stay after the show to meet our audience, which nobody ever does. You know, they perform, and then they're gone, and you never hear from them again. We come out and meet people -" "And date them!" interrupted Jon. Cliff continued, "I think even if we get big, you know, that's something we won't give up. I personally like that part!"

It's obvious that all of the Flirts enjoy what they do. And what they do is much more than entertainment, although that part should not be overlooked. With tight harmonies and wit they revise lyrics to such classics as *Mr. Sandman*. "Mr. Sandman, bring me a man. No one psychotic or Republican. Give him two legs like Greg Louganis; but make him public about his gayness!" Cliff tells the audience of his admiration for Johnny Mathis, and then breaks into a rendition of Johnny Angel. Aurelio, who has two lesbian sisters, rehearses the audience for their part in the "lesbian Latina participatory song", *Donde Esta Dolores (Where is Dolores?)* The answer is that she has run off with her lover, Magdalena (much to the delight of the audience!) Lyrics to some songs remain unchanged, such as Cris Williamson's *Shooting Star* and James Taylor's *Secret o' Life*. The transformation occurs in the Flirts vocal treatments.

The Burlington performance included a segment in which Jon invited the audience to ask their scandalous questions. They did. "Have any of you been lovers?" After a discussion of the semantics of the word 'lovers', they told the audience, "Three of us have been intimate with three of us", and agreed that they had answered the question.

Throughout the show the Flirts impressed us all with their professionalism, their beautiful harmonies, their immediate rapport with the audience, and their originality. Additionally, what they do when they sing to us is to create a safe space where we can all relax and be ourselves.

After a P'town performance last summer, I spoke briefly with Michael Callen, thanking him for surfacing so many emotions. "You made me cry," I told him. He immediately reached for my hand and said that he hoped it wasn't a bad, sad kind of crying. No . . . it was a good kind. "and the only measure of your words and your deeds will be the love you leave behind when you're gone."* Thanks, Flirts!

**Everything Possible* (Small; Rounder Records), sung by the Flirtations on *Out On The Road*, Flirt Records, 1992.

NOTE: Many of the songs performed in Burlington are on the 1992 tape/CD, *Out On The Road*, available from The Flirts, P.O.Box 421, Prince Street Station, NY, NY 10012-0008 ▼

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