



# THE MILLS

Starring **JOHN MILLS** with **ELMER HOPPER**

# BROTHERS™



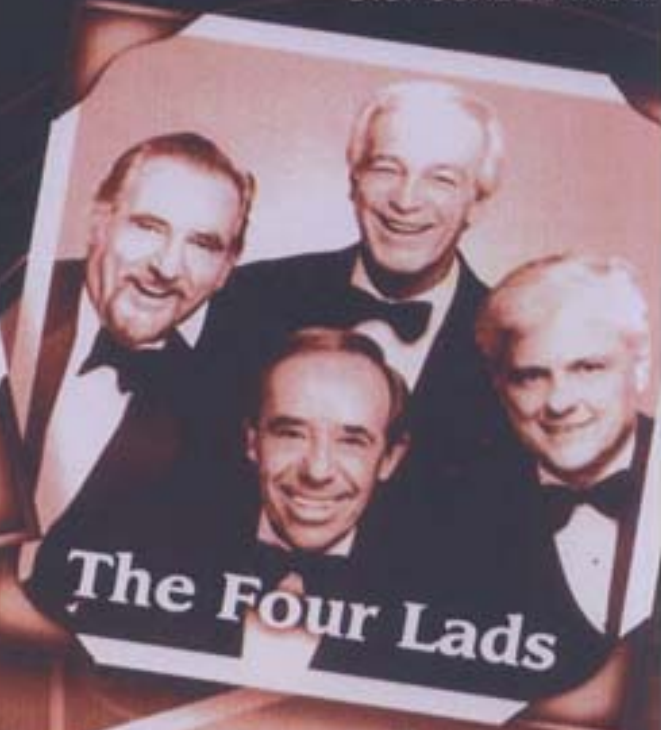
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FORMER LEAD  
SINGER OF THE  
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Rosemary Clooney, Helen O'Connell,  
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The Ink Spots,  
Little Anthony,  
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Chuck Berry,  
Fats Domino,  
Solomon Burke,  
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Al Martino,  
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*NEWS FROM  
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**THE ELOQUENT MUSIC OF THE LEGENDARY MILLS BROTHERS  
CONTINUES TO CAPTURE THE FANCY OF AUDIENCES WORLDWIDE**

For more than uninterrupted 75 years, the magical appeal of the eloquent music of The Mills Brothers has attracted adoring audiences worldwide.

The magic continues unabated today under the leadership of John Mills – who is the son, grandson and nephew of the original group's members - recreates the inimitable sounds of The Mills Brothers while vocalizing the multitude of hit songs that made them famous.

**John H. Mills, II**

John Mills had performed with his father, Donald Mills -- the last surviving original-- since 1982, and now brings to stage the newest generation of The Mills Brothers. The new duo includes and highlights the beautiful voice and compelling stage presence of the talented Elmer Hopper, who spent 21 years with the renowned Platters.

From the first time The Mills Brothers stepped onto a stage at the Mays Opera House in Piqua, Ohio, more than two generations ago, their distinctive sound captured the fancy of audiences, a mystique that continues today.

Honored with a **Grammy for Lifetime Achievement** in 1998, The Mills Brothers' harmonies and unmistakable repertoire of hits still symbolize a legendary tradition to a new millennium of audiences.

Among the memorable portfolio of recordings that John and Elmer dramatically present are "Tiger Rag," the original group's first hit from 1928, "Cab Driver," "Glow Worm," "Lazy River," "Yellow Bird," "Basin Street Blues," "Opus One," "Paper Doll" and many others.

The parade of Mills Brothers' recordings continued into the 1990s, when John and his father released their own CD, "Still...There's You," a compilation of some of the original group's greatest songs and new material composed by John.

The number of Mills Brothers records sold is uncountable, certainly well into the many tens of millions. They had a certifiable hit each year between 1935 and 1947 and they kept coming through the mid-1960s with "Cab Driver." "Paper Doll" alone sold six million copies in its first release and it was just one of more than 2,000 recordings that produced at least three dozen legitimate hits.

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## Elmer Hopper

Elmer Hopper spent 21 years with The Platters. In 1974, at the age of nineteen, Elmer was trained personally by Paul Robi, (the baritone of the original group.) He accompanied Paul on an international tour spanning the globe from Japan and China, to Canada and Australia in what was said to be the best ensemble of *The Platters* since the group's inception.

Elmer Hopper and Paul Robi were best of friends for more than 15 years until Paul succumbed to cancer in February of 1989. Paul did not leave Elmer without a final message of inspiration. During a visit, just a few days before Paul passed away, he asked Elmer to "...Please continue keeping The Platters legacy alive!" Not long after losing his dear friend and mourning the loss of a great team member, Elmer hit the stage with renewed vigor touring the world with The Platters for the next several years...

...Upon the hospitalization of Donald F. Mills, Sr. of the Mills Brothers, Elmer joined forces with Donald's son John H. Mills, II, in June of 1999. Forming this newest generation of The Mills Brothers, John and Elmer present a singular recreation of music that has been universally embraced by audiences since 1922.

On tour, John Mills and Elmer Hopper, have combined their unique talents to present the incomparable music of The Mills Brothers in the original keys and with the original scores, embracing an artistic opportunity unparalleled, demanding a high level of vocal musicality and integrity that is rare in this day and age.

Elmer Hopper is a truly gifted singer who says that performing in this show has been extremely gratifying, as there are few endeavors that compare with his prior, illustrious musical achievements.

*"Capacity crowds singing along with familiar songs, rising to their feet cheering through multiple standing ovations... there's nothing like it!"*

# The Arts

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1998

## The New York Times

### Carling

Don Mills, the last surviving member of the



original Mills Brothers, will accept the accolades tonight when the sweet-singing ensemble is honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. The ceremonies, at the Metropolitan Museum

of Art, are in conjunction with Grammy Awards week. Mr. Mills, 82, continues to perform with his son John H. Mills 2d, as John and Donald Mills of the Mills Brothers. Others to be honored this year include Bo Diddley, Paul Robeson and Roy Orbison.

LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

# DAILY @ NEWS

50c

<http://www.msnny.com>
**NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER**

Wednesday, February 25, 1998



**MILLS MILESTONE:** The group's legacy is faithfully continued by Donald (Inset).

## The Mills Are Still Alive With the Sound of Music

By DAVID HINCKLEY

Daily News Staff Writer

**LET'S FACE IT:** NOT TOO MANY singers these days can look at the original Ink Spots as the new kids on the block.

Donald Mills, however, is one of them. The last surviving original Mills Brother, Donald, started singing with his brothers, John, Harry and Herbert, in 1922, when he was 7. He has been singing with the Mills Brothers ever since — 75 years, one group.

Which means he's seen a lot of groups come and go.

"Yes, we were good friends with the Ink Spots," he says. "Charlie Fugua, Deek Watson. But of course, the Ink Spots came along years after we started in the business."

Mills' brothers have all passed away — as has his father, who sang with the group from 1935 to 1956. But Donald, with his son John, keeps the brothers' smooth, relaxed harmony going.

"We've been fortunate never to have had a slow period," Donald Mills says. "People all over the world just seem to like what we do."

Tonight at Radio City, the Grammy Awards will nod in agreement, giving the Mills Brothers a Lifetime Achievement Award. Seldom has an award seemed more appropriate — not only for the group's 75-year run, but because the Mills Brothers have never won a Gram-

my. Their biggest commercial years, in the '30s and '40s, pre-dated the awards.

The Mills Brothers did, however, become an indelible part of the 20th century's popular-music soundtrack. "Paper Doll" alone was a No. 1 hit for three months in 1943.

Donald Mills, chuckling again, says he has no idea how many times he has sung "Paper Doll" in 55 years. Ten thousand times? Twenty thousand?

The Brothers started as a novelty act, four singing kids at the Mays Opera House in Piqua, Ohio. Early, they were billed as "Four Boys and a Guitar," and became noted for imitating instruments with their voices.

"We got that from broadcasts of Duke Ellington," says Mills. "We just imitated the sounds."

But by the time "Tiger Rag" sold a million copies for them in 1928, it was clear they were built to last. They had a way of making songs sound easy, as if anyone could do it. Thing is, no one has, at least for 75 years.

"I don't really hear the Mills Brothers in the groups that came along after World War II," says Mills. "The Orioles, the Ravens. They were very good. But they had their own style."

So do the Mills Brothers — which the music industry acknowledges tonight.

"We've had a few awards over the years," says Mills. "This one is nice."



# THE MILLS BROTHERS

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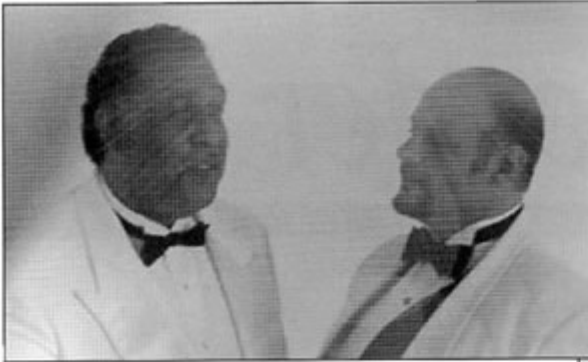
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Elmer Hopper and John Mills III, the current incarnation of The Mills Brothers.

## The Mills Brothers quietly opened doors

By Steve Penhollow  
The Journal Gazette

On his first day as a student at Los Angeles' Loyola High School in the early '70s, John Mills III walked into the classroom sporting a skyhigh afro into which was stuffed a comb bearing the black power symbol: an upraised fist.

"I had spent first through eighth grades in a military school environment, so this was something entirely new to me," Mills says. "The teacher took it out of my hair and pulled off every tooth of that comb. He said, 'You're not going to get away with that sort of thing in this school.'"

"I was immature and floundering around at that point, but I was sincerely seeking a new level of consciousness and awareness about my race."

It might be hard for some people to square that image with the John Mills that currently tours the country, carrying on the legacy of his late father's smooth and dapper vocal group, The Mills Brothers. The millennial edition of The Mills Brothers performs tonight at the Embassy Centre.

Indeed, Mills says, he wouldn't have been anybody's choice for president of The Mills Brothers Fan Club in the late '60s and early '70s.

In addition to being a burgeoning racial activist, Mills was a pianist and trumpeter whose favorite musicians were jazz fusionists and art rockers.

"When (The Mills Brothers' last hit) 'Cab Driver' came out in '68, I was like, 'How could you guys do this?' At that age, I was thinking about pushing the envelope, working with guys like (jazz bassist) Stanley Clarke and David Bowie. I remember having a very strong conversation with one of my uncles on the value of an afro. Needless to say, he didn't see my side of things."

For the teen-aged John Mills, a civil rights

pioneer was someone who protested and bucked the system and pummeled the prevailing tide.

But as Mills matured, he began to realize how much his father, Donald, and his uncles had quietly accomplished.

The Mills Brothers hosted their own network radio show at a time when segregation was still the rule rather than the exception in much of the country. The sponsors of the program were some of the biggest companies going at the time: Standard Oil, Procter and Gamble Co., and Crisco.

They scored dozens of hits; shared the big screen with Bing Crosby, George Burns and Ginger Rogers; and became the first black entertainers to give a command performance before British royalty.

One of the people who woke John Mills up to the truth was Sammy Davis Jr.

"It was hard for me to imagine the pioneerism that was inherent in just living how they lived. These guys played in places where black entertainers had never worked before. I remember asking Sammy Davis, 'How do you do this?' He was on full tilt all the time, doing TV and movies and tours and shows in Vegas. And he said, 'I couldn't have done any of it without your father and uncles.'"

"They never got any recognition or kudos for it. They never asked for any. They just lived it. They weren't out to make a statement. They just let the chips fall where they fell."

Mills believes his father and uncles must have encountered racism equal to that suffered by other touring black entertainers who were popular during The Mills Brothers' heyday - Nat



Top: John Mills III and his late father, Donald, perform at the Ray Briem Big Band Bash. Right: Harry, Donald and Herb Mills, and guitarist Norman Brown.



Left: Harry, Donald and Herb Mills. The Mills Brothers started out as a quartet. When brother John Jr. died in 1936, father John Sr. joined the group. The group became a trio when John Sr. retired in 1956.



The original Mills Brothers: Herb, Donald, Harry and John Mills Jr. in 1931.



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## Mills

King Cole and Lena Horne, just to name two – but they never talked about it, because they weren't ones to complain about anything.

Mills says this is doubly stunning to him because his mother, Sylvia, was white.

"We're talking about an issue that is still on the table today. I remember staying at a motel in Vegas in the '60s. There was a sign by the pool that said, 'Colored after 7.' That was the '60s. I can't even imagine what it must have been like for them in the '30s and '40s. It's a miracle I'm even here today."

When Harry Mills died in 1982 and Herbert was forced to retire due to a bad back, it looked as if the Mills Brothers was finally through after 60 years. Instead, Donald – who was 66 at that point – asked son John to join him on stage and continue The Mills Brothers tradition as a duo.

Mills, whose voice is an eerie doppelganger of his dad's, had reached a point in his personal development where he could readily acquiesce.

"My dad could have stopped if he wanted to. It wasn't like he had anything to prove. But he was still in great voice. And he was just the sort of guy who just wanted to get back to work."

Mills wasn't sure in the beginning he had the resources to uphold the group's high standards.

"I remember Herb came to one of our Vegas shows and I was so *was doing his* show. But afterwards he came up to me and said, 'That was just the greatest.' You got the sense that he would have just loved to have been up there himself if he could."

Mills says touring with his dad was a dream. His professionalism and work ethic were unmatched.

"It was awesome to work with him. He was so good: always on time, never forgot a word, never missed a note. And he was so good to people. He was so approachable; he would stop and talk to anybody.

"When he was wearing a tuxedo, he wouldn't sit down because he was afraid of putting a crease in it."

In the late '80s, Donald Mills was told he would have to have a leg amputated because of arterial sclerosis.

For most people, this would trigger an existential tug-of-war and an

avalanche of angst, but Donald was the ultimate pragmatist.

"He told the doctors, 'Well, if it needs to be taken off, then take it off.'"

While Donald was still recuperating. The Mills Brothers were asked to appear at a fund-raiser in Vegas: "It was a big, big benefit. He was still getting used to his prosthesis. He had gone through a wheelchair and a walker and was now using a cane.

"We were in the wings getting ready. When they called us, he left his cane there and walked out as if there was nothing wrong. No one ever knew the truth.

"He was so regal. After we got off stage, (jazz vocalist) Kay Starr said to me, 'That man is stronger than garlic.' "Donald passed away mid-tour in 1999. His son didn't have to think too long or hard about continuing on. Shows were promised and shows needed to be performed. He recruited a former member of The Platters, Elmer Hopper, to become a surrogate Mills Brother.

Mills was part of a campaign to win The Mills Brothers their first Grammy, a Lifetime Achievement Award that was bestowed in 1998. He is putting together a Broadway show about the history of the group.

He feels his modern mission is two-fold: win The Mills Brothers respect they weren't granted when the original members were alive, and protect the group's legacy.

"The Mills Brothers is a brand name. My father and my uncles took a great deal of time to imbue it with a tremendous amount of value. There are all sorts of people out there now who are exploiting and cheapening the names of great bands and family groups; you're lucky if a cousin or a second cousin of the original members is involved. I felt there was a real danger of that happening to The Mills Brothers.

"I also didn't want The Mills Brothers to become a nostalgic type of thing. I don't want people to ever say, 'Oh, The Mills Brothers, that's old music.' There's a huge fan base out there and they deserve better than a 'Forever Plaid' kind of tribute."

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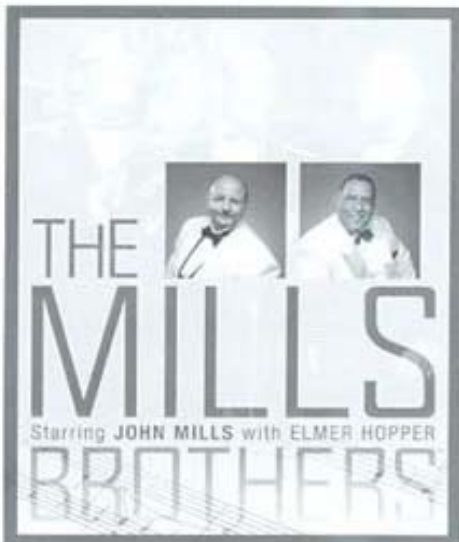
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## Mills Brothers' harmonies become a cherished legacy

MARGARET BERNSTEIN  
Plain Dealer Reporter

Running the family business ain't bad, when you're handed the keys to a musical dynasty.

The Mills Brothers, the always-dapper Ohio-born quartet that crooned some of the most well-loved songs of the 1930s and '40s, managed to keep on making hits until the 1960s.

And now that all the original members have died, the tuxedo has been passed to John Mills II, 46, son of the youngest Mills Brother, Donald.

On tour currently with hand-picked partner Elmer Hopper, formerly of the Platters, John Mills II says he's pleased to find there are still audiences that thrill to hear swing classics such as "Paper Doll," "Lazy River," "Glow Worm" and "You Always Hurt the One You Love." And he's doing his best "not to mess up" the legacy he's been handed, says Mills, whose father rehearsed him tirelessly on the silky Mills Brothers harmonies before he died in 1999.

Mills says he's astonished by the loyalty of the fans he's inherited. The Mills Brothers even have their own preservation society, which lobbies fervently for recognition of the group.

"A guy'll tell me he was stationed in the Pacific during World War II, and when he left his wife, the song that carried them through was 'Till Then.' Or somebody will say that 'Daddy's Little Girl' was the song they gave their daughter away to at their wedding. People are still using that as a wedding song in 2002. This stuff has a life of its own."

He might be a Mills Brothers aficionado now, but Mills didn't always appreciate the smooth stylings of his dad and uncles.

"In the '60s, everything was coming psychedelic. The Beatles were putting together theme albums, there were the Stones, all the soul stuff was breaking out. That was cutting-edge stuff, and my dad and them were so mainstream," he said. "I didn't think of it then as classic American music."

He didn't comprehend then how the Mills Brothers sang their way into musical history, with memorable songs that had unheard-of crossover appeal. In

### PREVIEW

#### The Mills Brothers

**What:** A next-generation spinoff of the legendary group will headline "A Night to Remember," with the Four Lads and the Ink Spots.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday.

**Where:** Allen Theatre, Playhouse Square, Cleveland.

**Tickets:** \$46 and \$50.50. Available at Advantix locations and the Playhouse Square box office, or by calling 216-241-6000 or 1-800-766-6048.

1934, the Mills Brothers became the first blacks to give a command performance in front of British royalty.

"I didn't understand the historical significance of having hits in every decade from the '20s on up," Mills says. "Cab Driver" to me in 1968 wasn't on the same par as Iron Butterfly. But what did I know?"

It took some serious nudging — and from a serious star — before Mills grasped the value of his inheritance.

"I was a big fan of Sammy Davis, he was one of the first guys to have a syndicated TV show. He pushed the envelope. He was pretty much funding it himself," Mills says.

"He told me he couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the Mills Brothers coming ahead of him. As the years went on, I could see where they cut a bigger path than I could ever imagine."

In the 1980s, Mills began touring with the two surviving members, his dad and Uncle Herb. After his uncle died, the show went on as a father-and-son act. Reprising the trademark sound accurately was a challenge they were determined to meet, Mills says.

"My dad and I used to sit around and practice the harmonies until we could do them seamlessly," he says.

He began handling the family business with savvy.

"We trademarked the name years ago, before my dad passed away. That was just something I had the foresight to do," Mills says. "There's a lot of bogus stuff going on. I know guys who can't work in the groups they founded."

Mills, who was raised in Los Angeles and still lives there, marvels at the simple lifestyle the Mills Brothers maintained.

The brothers, John, Herbert,

Harry and Donald, began singing in church in their hometown of Piqua, Ohio, in the 1920s. Ohio played an important role in their rise to fame: They got their big break in 1928 after auditioning for a Cincinnati radio station. That helped them win the opportunity to open for Duke Ellington in Cincinnati, who was so impressed he helped them land a contract. Father John Sr. stepped in to join the group when John Jr. died in 1936.

Although their music earned them international acclaim, they remained a down-to-earth, closely knit clan, Mills says.

"They were four brothers who spent their lives working together," he says.

"I think they had a great sense of style and of knowing what the people would like. There was no big public-relations campaign that stormed the market. Their audience wasn't built on PR firms. They were just very fortunate to do great tunes that people liked."

Mills didn't hold auditions after his dad died. Elmer Hopper, who lived just a mile from him and had visited Mills' ailing father in the hospital, seemed to magically appear at the right time with the perfect resume. Hopper had toured the world as a member of the Platters and certainly could learn the exacting harmonies.

"I have a great admiration and respect for him. He has one of the prettiest voices. Pure chops," Mills says. "He gets his own standing ovations."

Mills says interacting with the fans has been unforgettable.

"People will come up and tell me something with tears in their eyes. I had a lady tell me she had to take her mom out, she was crying so much. You don't get to see into people's eyes and their souls like that," he says. "When you get 80-year-olds... on their feet giving you standing ovations, you've done something."

"When we hit the stage, there's a lot to uphold there," he says, adding with a laugh: "I mean it when I say, we just try not to mess it up."

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: nbernstein@pand.com, 216-999-4876

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To whom it may concern:

**Music Director & Conductor**  
Bob Lappin

It with great enthusiasm that I provide you with this letter of recommendation for The Mills Brothers.

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Bob Lappin and the Palm Beach Pops were honored to have John Mills and Elmer Hopper join the orchestra for a magical evening celebrating the world-famous Mills Brothers. With countless years of entertainment genius behind them and a long line of legendary experience, the concert was a night to remember.

The Palm Beach Pops, Florida's Premier Symphonic Pops Orchestra, is a 65 piece orchestra with thousands of subscribers. The Mills Brothers are not only a strong draw, but a professional and musically superb duo of entertainers. All five concerts in our Big Band series commanded standing ovations and brought tremendous excitement and reward to our sponsors for each evening.

If you are considering The Mills Brothers for an evening of entertainment with your symphony, it would be our opinion that you would make a worthwhile investment in what our audiences characterized as one of the best concerts of our season.

Cordially,  
  
Jon Lappin  
Executive Director

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Configuration for Jazz/Blues Festivals

There's no disputing *The Mills Brothers* brand, but what people tend to forget is our group's distinguished *Big Band Jazz* credentials.



*The Mills Brothers Big Band Jazz Ensemble* would be an exciting and valuable addition to virtually any national or international jazz festival or jazz cruise. In concert, we perform the original. *Mills Brothers* big band charts, featuring the orchestrations of such greats as **Sy Oliver**, **Dick Hyman**, **Chico O'Farrell**, and tunes recorded with the **Count Basie Orchestra** among many others.

A small sample of the current day musicians with whom we perform includes:

- Wally "Gator" Watson/ Butch Miles/ Clarence Acox, Jr. / Sherry Maricle/ Ray Von Rotz (Drums)
- Tony Suggs/ Jeff Lisenby/ Paul McDonald/ Tamir Hendelman (Piano-Keyboards)
- James Leary/ Cleveland Eaton/ Ralph Armstrong/ Dave Stone/ Tim Smith (Bass)
- Will Mathews / Tom Cherry / Freddy Green / Norman Brown (Guitar)
- Snooky Young/ John Thomas/ Scotty Barnhart/ Lee Thornberg/ Laroon Holt/
- Don Smith / Jack Cohen (Trumpets)
- Roy Main / Jack Redmond / Chauncy Welsch / Ira Nepas (Trombones)
- Craig Handy / Sheila Gonzales / Kim Richmond / Jeff Clayton / Roger Neumann / Lee Callet / John Williams (Saxophones) etc...

Audiences are hungry to see something new, yet familiar and that's what today's *Mills Brothers* represent. Many jazz festivals feature the same headliners year after year. We offer a hard-to-beat alternative - a **great, historic brand with access to the world's finest musicians** – a combination that translates into extraordinary jazz / pop performances.

*We think we're something your clients are waiting for and hope you'll jump at the opportunity!*