

# *The Renaissance*

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## **The Lettermen at the Renaissance Theatre, January 10, 2009,**



### **The Lettermen**

**Close harmonies brought success to the Lettermen, whose initial thrust in the pop music market nailed them a No. 13 in the Billboard charts, the first of several hits for the trio.**

**It all began in 1960 when Jim Pike and Bob Engemann, students at Brigham Young University in Utah, joined nightclub singer Tony Butala and went to work. Since athletic Pike had lettered at BYU, the trio decided to call themselves the Lettermen. Pike (b. 1938) had already had an unsuccessful single for Warner Bros. the previous year and Butala (b. 1940) had also had some recording experience. When Engemann (b. 1936), an ex-Mormon missionary, joined they**

**went after a recording contract and signed with Capitol.**

**The trio's first single for Capitol was "The Way You Look Tonight" and it zoomed up to No. 13, setting the stage for an even more successful "When I Fall In Love," which captured No. 7. Three months later, they struck gold again with "Come Back Silly Girl" making the Top 20. In 1968, they hit the Top 10 again with the medley "Goin' Out of My Head/Can't Take My**

**" Before the '60s were over, the Lettermen had put out albums of smoothly-sung material with at least ten of the Top 40 album chart and a number of singles tapping**



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## The Lettermen

**Tony Butala began singing professionally at age seven in Sharon, Pennsylvania and by the age of eight on KDKA Radio in Pittsburgh, PA. Within a few years, he moved to Hollywood, California to become a member of the famous Mitchell Boys Choir, who since 1932 had appeared in over one hundred motion pictures, scores of television and radio shows, radio & television commercials, and world-wide concert tours. While in the choir, he appeared in such classic films as *White Christmas*, *Peter Pan*, *War of the Worlds*, and *On Moonlight Bay*.**

**By 1960, The Lettermen - now Butala, Jim Pike (whose falsetto pre-dated Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons) and Bob Engemann - were signed to Warner Brothers Records and released their first singles: "Their Hearts Were Full Of Spring" b/w "When" and "The Magic Sound" b/w "Two Hearts." In 1961, Nic Venet, a new, young, creative A&R man with Capitol Records who years earlier had written a few songs with Butala, played these first records.**

**Butala's breathy vocals were the lead on most of The Lettermen's many hit records, except "Theme From A Summer Place." In almost every poll, The Lettermen were named Best New Group or Best Vocal Group as two more albums followed in 1962. "Once Upon A Time," and "Jim, Tony and Bob," the latter an effort to segue away from The Lettermen name....**

**Donovan Tea joined The Lettermen in 1984, and his tenure of over twenty-four years has been the longest other than Butala's. Tea was born in Houston, Texas, and started singing professionally at 17, when he won an international vocal competition in Guilford, England. After touring Europe, he returned home to sing at the Hollywood Bowl with the L.A. Master Chorale. At eighteen, he became a lead singer for The Young Americans, opening for the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Rich Little, Tennessee Ernie Ford and Tony Bennett. He also performed for President Gerald Ford in Washington, D.C.**

**Tea became a member of the Lettermen in the fall of 1984. Donovan's most favorite things in life are his wife Darla, his daughter Landry, his son Lawson and working his cattle ranch in North Central Tennessee.**

**Mark Preston was born in South Bend, Indiana, in the shadow of the University of Notre Dame. He has been singing professionally since the age of 9. Starting with small singing engagements in and around his home town, he has been on stage for over 40 years.**

**After an appearance on the "Dinah Shore Television Show," Mark was called to Las Vegas, Reno, and Lake Tahoe, where he worked as a featured soloist in many major showrooms. Variety magazine called him "one of the finest entertainers in show business." He appeared for several years with Phyllis Diller as her opening act, and as an actor, made numerous appearances on the hit television series "Vegas," as well as being the stand-in and photo double for the show's star Robert Urich. He went on to do guest appearances on several other network specials.**

**Mark co-hosted the syndicated variety show "Braun & Company" in Cincinnati. It was on this show that The Lettermen made a guest appearance. Tony Butala was so impressed with Mark and his voice that he mentioned if a vacancy should happen in the group, he would want Mark to fill that vacancy.**

**A short time later, a double vacancy occurred and Mark, along with his best friend**