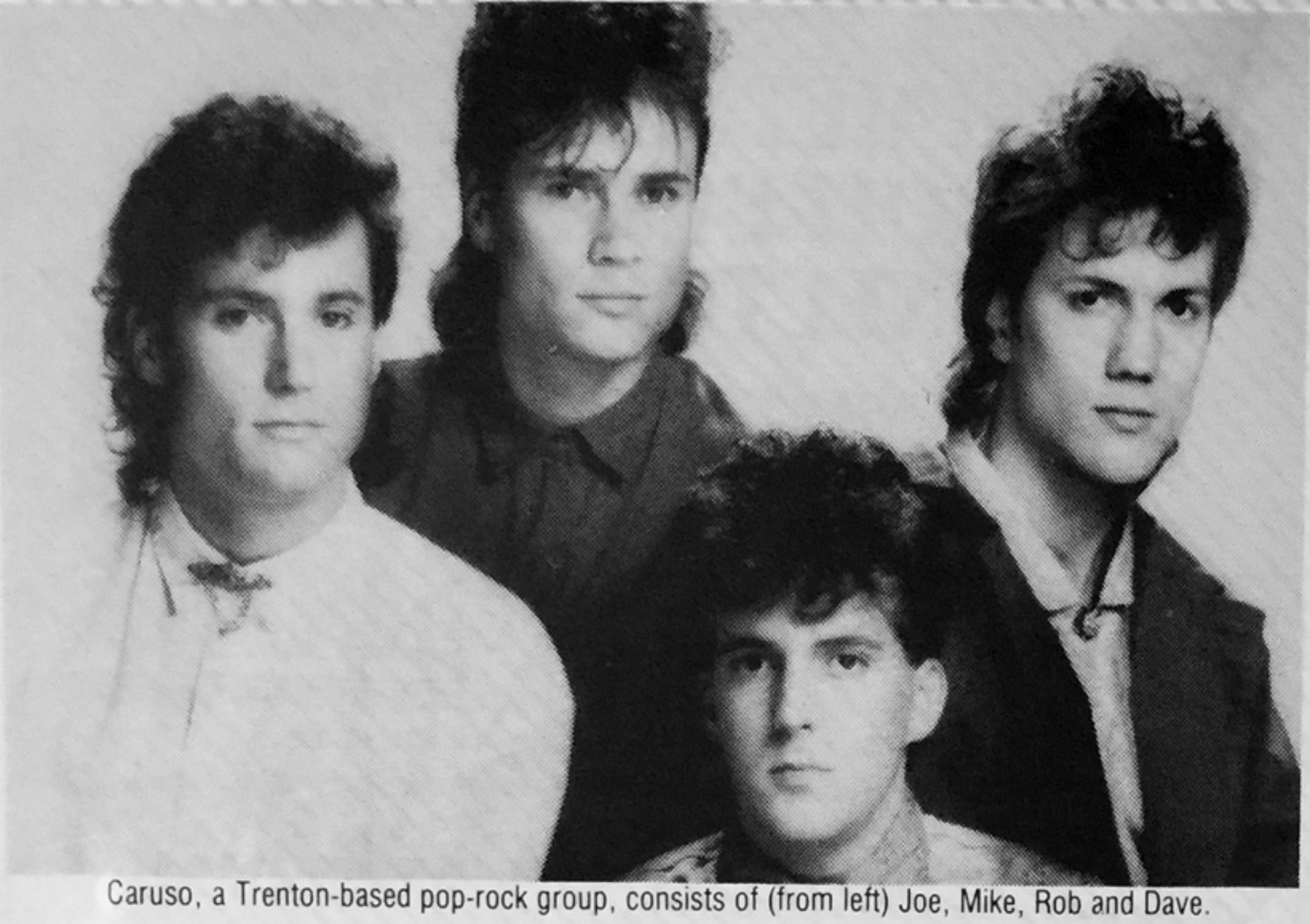


Caruso, a Trenton-based pop-rock group, consists of (from left) Joe, Mike, Rob and Dave.

Caruso: Rocking to the top

By DAN WANTUCK

Among those nominated by the National Association for Campus Activities for American College Entertainer of the Year for 1985 were Huey Lewis and the News, Ronnie Milsap, David Brenner and a five-piece group based in Trenton known as Caruso.

Caruso's brand of upbeat pop-rock has been winning legions of fans especially within the college crowd, from Ontario to Florida. But increasingly, as the group's horizons expand, it is reeling in followers of more divergent educational backgrounds and ages.

Four-fifths of Caruso's membership are brothers in their early and mid-20's, after whom the group is named.

Mike Caruso, the eldest at 27, plays the electric bass and doubles on trumpet. Dave, 22, plays keyboards and the guitar. Joe, 26, takes on the saxophone and guitar. Rob, 22, is the drummer.

All four brothers provide vocals and write songs for the group, but Dave is the lead singer and primary songwriter.

Separately, the four contribute to a wide variety of musical ventures.

Rounding out the band Caruso is Bradley Davenport as lead guitarist.

Many rock bands pride themselves on the kind of presentation that bowls its listeners over and leaves them drained and disoriented. Caruso's presentation, on the other hand, is evenly balanced stylelistically and acoustically. Its audiences are left feeling invigorated and positive.

Whether performing its own works or that of others, Caruso covers the entire scope of rock expression. But the band is most devoted to the greater craft and creativity in the more melodic aspects. And it is intent on ensuring that each instrument in every number is heard at the level that benfits it at the time.

Commercial success has bloomed for Caruso in the past two years. Milwaukee's Miller Brewing Company has hired the band to advertise its beer at their concert and nightclub appearances. The group has also come to the attention of such performers as Brian Adams, UB-42 and Joan Jett and the Blackhearts--who have all employed the Caruso as the preliminary act on some of their concert tours.

Ability alone, however, hardly makes one a success in the music industry. Each contender for fame needs a strong business force behind them providing the operating funds, work opportunities and advertisement.

That force behind Caruso is the Caruso brothers, themselves.

Caruso averages 300 playing dates yearly. Mike reports that the income the band makes is more than adequate. Instead of squandering it on conspicuous consumption, the bulk of it is put to work improving the sound and appearance of the band and powering the Caruso-run business force behind it.

Although their father played trumpet, the brothers' entry into the music came through music lessons as young children in the Trenton school system. They have been playing together since the earliest days on their first instruments.

Each member of the band is given a chance to shine, and in his own way. Collectively, the five members ably read the disposition and wants of their audiences, and they relate with and play for them accordingly.

Their general conduct also shows that their lives are unhampered by the substance abuse that plays havoc with the lives of so many musicians, especially those in the rock field.

The brothers have a high sense of maintaining relationships with family and friends. This, says Mike, is the key reason Caruso remains headquarted in their hometown of Trenton.

Caruso has five singles and one E.P. (seven-inch 33-RPM record) to its credit. These are available at the Harmony House record outlets.

But these releases are only small-scale. While Caruso's highest goal of getting signed to a big-time recording contract has not yet come to fruition, Mike maintains the group has already received its most important break.

As for that National Association for Campus Activities' Entertainer of the Year award, it was won by Huey Lewis and the News.

But the members of Caruso are not downcast.

"Whatever happens, happens," says Mike optimistically. "We just try and play the best show we can."

They have not yet risen to the height of their potential. But already the group runs a healthy mail order service providing Caruso momentos and recordings.

Detroit area fans have access to the Caruso Hotline, at 671-8341. This lists the band's local appearances and gives information on how one may get on the band's mailing list.□