

# ENTERTAINMENT·C



The all-brother band: Joe (left), Dave, Rob and Mike Caruso. Photo by Larry Caruso

# To the top

## *Success is a step away for Caruso with release of new album*

**By Sandra Pastuszka**
**Staff Writer**

The climb to the top has been a steady one for Caruso.

And the Trenton-based band of brothers is one rung higher on the ladder to success with the release of its second album, "In the Face."

The extended play (EP) record of four-plus songs was released this week, and is being sold exclusively at area Harmony House stores.

Born and raised in Trenton, Mike, Joe, Dave and Rob Caruso have been playing together for about 20 years.

At first featured at family picnics and city festivals, the band has matured into one of the most popular groups on the college concert circuit.

And they are hopeful that the musical effort can help them achieve their next goal, a three-year, $700,000 contract with a major record company.

"We want to use this as a vehicle to cement a deal with a record company," says Joe, the second oldest at 27.

"The Top 40 market is hard to break into," says Mike. "It's hard to get airplay on the radio in your home town."

**THE NAME** of the new album ties into this struggle to make Caruso a household name. "People are not hearing our music and saying, 'I like the way the band sounds,' " Mike explains.

Instead, concertgoers may learn of the group through promotional posters and newspaper articles. "They go to hear the band on the basis of how we look and not on how we sound," Mike says.

"In the Face" relates to the fact that most people "judge us by what they see in our faces, not by our music," Mike says.

The band hopes that "In the Face" will perform as well as their last album, "Caruso," released nearly three years ago, which sold out the 6,000 copies that were pressed — including a total of 4,000 in the Detroit area alone, according to Mike.

Caruso, aided by some outside financial backing, has invested $36,000 into the recording of "In the Face."

**THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY** was used in the production of the album, which is appearing on an independent label, Nu Beat Records.

Because it was digitally mastered, the album has less noise and a better sound, according to the band members. It was produced by Eric Morgeson at Studio A in Detroit.

Caruso squeezed recording time into a busy performance schedule during the first half of this year. Because they were on the road, it took about four months to record the four songs on the EP.

"We would start at 9 in the morning and go to 6 at night, go home and shower and go to our local shows," Joe says. In addition to playing on college campuses, Caruso has been performing regularly at Jagger's night club in Waterford and at California's in Windsor.

**AND EACH DAY** has to include management responsibilities, such as booking shows and making contacts in the recording industry, mostly split between Joe and Mike, on top of writing new songs and holding regular practices twice weekly.

"We don't have a manager, so we're making all the arrangements ourselves," Mike explains. "This involves not only the recording, but marketing, imagemaking, connecting ourselves with people in the music industry and developing a live following."

All totaled, this makes for 15-hour days, seven days a week.

"We have to be businessmen, accountants, politicians, salesmen and then get on the stage and be musicians besides," says Joe.

**EACH BROTHER** shares musicmaking tasks. The album features Mike on bass, Joe on guitar, Dave on keyboards, Rob on drums, and all four doing vocals.

However, their talents extend into other musical instruments. Mike can take on the trumpet, Rob tinkers on keyboards and strums a guitar, as does Dave, and Joe is proficient in saxophone, clarinet, flute and keyboards.

All of the songs on "In the Face" were written by Dave, 26, but each Caruso writes music.

Portions of the record were created outside of Michigan, making it an all-American product: It was mastered in Tennessee and printed in Missouri, and the cover photo was taken in Ohio.

**THE ORIGINAL** target release date was July 1, Joe says, but communication problems on what the end result should sound like added more than a month to the date the album hits record store shelves.

"We made the decision rather than to release an inferior product to have them redo it, which cost a lot of money," Joe says.

Outside financing has helped them achieve this goal, he says: "We were playing in the major leagues with minor league funds."

**IN ADDITION** to the release of their second album and performing at colleges across the country, Caruso has opened for a number of national acts, namely Joan Jett, Burton Cummings, UB40, Rick Springfield and, most recently, Corey Hart.

The band's popularity with college crowds is evidenced by the fact that they have been nominated for three consecutive years for the Campus Entertainment Awards best act, sharing the ballot with the likes of the Bangles and the Del Fuegos.

In order branch out into the national music market, Mike and Joe spent part of last month in New York City at a new music seminar, attempting to connect with record producers.

Without firsthand knowledge of what it takes to become national recording artists, Mike says it is difficult to determine what actually can be called success.

"If we're mildly amused by what we were doing a year ago, we feel we've made some steps," he says with a smile.

**THE GROUP** has its roots in the 1960s, when youngest brother Rob, now 24, was just 4 years old.

"I like to think that it started when we got a portable phonograph that we took shopping," remembers Mike. "Mom and Dad would go to the grocery store and never take us in because it was faster. Can you imagine four kids, (each) 15 months apart?

"We were constantly listening to records; I believe that is where this started to root."

**JOE SAYS** the quartet of brothers also used to sing around the campfire, "not like Kumbaya, but we would hear Elton John on the radio and we used to do

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## 'In the Face' captures energy

**By Sandra Pastuszka**
**Staff Writer**

The energy and personality of Caruso "live" has been captured on their new release, "In the Face."

A fresh, unique mix of pop rock music written by No. 3 brother, Dave, the album unveils the band's talent and potential for hitting the Top 40 market.

The four songs — "London," "Can't Stop Dreaming," "She's a Sensation" and "Young and Tender" — present a balanced blend of sounds and styles.

Of course, the distinctive harmony of Mike, Joe, Dave and Rob is highlighted in each piece of music.

And the album is capped off by a "surprise" 18-second bit of a cappella harmony that depicts the spirit of the clean-cut, all-American Carusos.

Highlights include the opening of "London," in which a drum beat fades up while voices rise in harmony, and the vocals-only start of "She's a Sensation."

REVIEW

It's difficult to name a single top song, because each sports stylized instrumentation and likeable lyrics.

In fact, all bases are covered in the tunes, with themes that deal with American music, romance and growing up.

And quite remarkable is the highly polished sound of the digitally mastered EP.

The band's live show, however, has a rougher sound.

But the rapport and brotherly intuition of the group is evidenced many times in their hour-long sets: One brother may glance at another and smile, as if sharing a family secret or a memory.

In fact, Joe says the intuition is so strong that sometimes, in the middle of a song, one Caruso will launch into another tune and the other three brothers will join in without missing a beat.

This harmony — in voice and in style — is one of the things that makes the Caruso sound so vibrant, so unique.

The band will be holding its last record release party, co-sponsored by WRIF radio, at Jaggers Tuesday night. For details call the Caruso hotline, 471-ROCK.

## Caruso

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a lot of old Beatles songs."

Then, they started playing for Girl Scout troupes and at the Trenton Theatre, giving the first pop rock concert at the now nearly defunct facility.

High school dances and weddings were the next step upward. "To this day, we get calls to do weddings," Joe says, even though they have not played a wedding in five years and their equipment could not fit into a reception hall.

"We're not the same band," says Rob about their previous experiences locally. "We have nothing in common except the same bodies."

**BUT THE IDEA** of a group of brothers playing together in a band, a key ingredient in their local popularity, still has universal appeal, Mike says.

And the brothers will continue to band together: "There is enough versatility and talent in this organization that eventually you will see some solo projects — but not until we make a name for ourselves," Mike says.

If Caruso does not reach its goal, Mike and Joe say they have made enough connections that they will be able to get jobs in the music industry. Even now, Dave and Rob teach music lessons on the side.

"We're realists," says Joe. "We know it may not happen."

**BUT OPTIMISM**, determination and confidence pervade their outlook. "We have no doubt that this is going to happen," Mike says, as Joe nods. "We're not looking at a bailout point."

The commitment is so intense that Joe describes it by saying "everybody is married to the band."

In fact, Mike says "we have 100 percent commitment" from the four single brothers.

"No marriage, nothing — short of an act of God — will detour this."