

Longtime Las Vegas Musician William 'Autie' Goodman

By Briana Erickson / Las Vegas Review-Journal. January 9, 2019

Wherever William Austin "Autie" Goodman went in life, from the ranch to the battlefield to the Strip, music followed.

As a young teen, when he wasn't working on a cattle ranch in Burns, Oregon, he was honing his skills on the clarinet.

When he joined the Army in 1943, his superiors quickly noted that his musical talents overshadowed his skills as a clerk and dispatched him to entertain officers on base in Saipan.

After moving to Las Vegas in 1956, he quickly made a name for himself performing at the Strip's casinos, playing with a group called the Modernaires before joining the long-running touring group the Four Freshmen in 1977.

Goodman, who retired to Pahrump, died in his sleep on December 20, 2019. He was 93.

Goodman was 12 when he heard world-renowned clarinetist Artie Shaw play. He turned to his father and said that's what he aspired to do. He got his first clarinet in the mail and took some lessons, and his interest in music skyrocketed from there.

In his teens, he began playing a tenor sax so he could join an up-and-coming group in Burns. He idolized the likes of Nat King Cole and Buddy DeFranco.

"Music's the only thing I've ever done," Goodman told the Pahrump Valley Times in a 2015 interview.

In 1943, he enlisted in the Army and was stationed in Saipan during World War II.

His son, Kris, remembers his father's story of watching the Enola Gay return after dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.

While in the military, Goodman met and performed in a trio with Bobby Troup, an actor, jazz pianist, singer and songwriter best-known for writing the song (*Get Your Kicks On*) *Route 66*. The two were lifelong friends and were later reunited during Goodman's time in the Four Freshmen.

After being honorably discharged in March 1946, Goodman moved to Portland, Oregon, where he met his wife of 67 years, Mildred.

His 93-year-old widow remembers meeting her husband-to-be for the first time in a Portland club, saying she noticed the baby-blue-eyed, brown-haired, 5-foot-9-inch musician immediately.

"Here was this cute, adorable man singing, playing the saxophone," she said, calling him "the greatest love-song singer."

"He was a perfect gentleman, and I fell in love with him," she said.

The two married on November 11, 1951. They moved to Phoenix and then to Las Vegas.

Autie Goodman, far right, with his band, The Modernaires. (Kris Goodman)



Autie Goodman, shown during a stint as a clarinet player in a three-piece band circa 1951.

15 Years with the Group

In the 1960s, Goodman played with the Modernaires and worked in the house band at the former Hacienda Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. In 1977, he was invited by Bob Flanigan, the last original member of the Four Freshmen, to join the group. He stayed for 15 years.

His career with The Four Freshmen, a band dating back to 1948 and known for performing jazz and classic pop in the style of a barbershop quartet, took him all around the world, including stops in about 20 different countries and every state in the union. Goodman sang solos and played the drums and the saxophone. The other group members also sang and played instruments such as keyboard, trombone, bass and guitar.

Hits performed by the group over its seven-decade history include *Graduation Day*, *It's a Blue World* and *Day by Day*. Goodman's favorite was *It Could Happen To You*.

While in the band, he worked with the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., and the group was nominated for two Grammy Awards.

(continued on page 10)