

Obituary: Mario Mosti / His passion since childhood was playing and teaching the accordion

May 29, 1924 - June 28, 2011

Sunday, August 07, 2011

By Marylynne Pitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Joyce Mendelson/Post-Gazette

Mario Mosti in 1995.

Mario Mosti's life revolved around playing, teaching and composing music for one instrument.

"His passion, till the day he died, was that accordion," said his daughter, Carol Rudiselle of Hempfield.

Mr. Mosti of Hempfield died of Parkinson's disease June 28 at Hempfield Manor nursing home in Greensburg. He was 87.

When he was 5, his father, Joe, showed him how to make his fingers fly over the black and white keys, find bass in the buttons and bend in the bellows.

"Dad used to make deals with my grandad. He'd say, 'If you let me stay home from school, I'll practice all day,' " said Mrs. Rudiselle, who lives in the house her father built.

Nicknamed the "squeeze box kid," he was 7 when he played at a Greensburg nightclub on the same bill with a young Gene Kelly. Mr. Mosti left school after seventh grade.

"He just stayed home with grandpap," an immigrant from Tuscany, Italy, Mrs. Rudiselle said. "Grandpap taught and he practiced," she said, adding that her father later studied music theory with Edward Harris of Johnstown.

During his career, Mr. Mosti played with Charles Magnanti, widely regarded as one of the world's best accordion players. He also performed at healing services led by his friend, evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman, his daughter said.

Gifted with perfect pitch, Mr. Mosti taught many people, including Steve Novosel, who was his student for five years and became button box state champion in Pennsylvania and Ohio when he was a teenager.

"He was very understanding and patient with me. I started when I was 11," said Mr. Novosel, who lives in Avonmore. "He gave away music."

Patient and soft-spoken, Mr. Mosti also knew how to fix accordions and button boxes and made his own tools to keep the instruments in tune. Musicians flocked to his home, lugging their broken instruments.

"When your accordion broke, if he charged you anything, it was very little to fix it," Mr. Novosel said.

Besides that skill, Mr. Mosti was a wise and good listener. So, if you had a problem, Mr. Novosel said, "Mario was a good guy to talk to."

The Mostis moved from Jeannette to Ebensburg when Mario, their only child, was about 18; the younger Mr. Mosti taught students at the family's home there.

The Mostis moved to Los Angeles because of Mario's allergies; Mario played the accordion on movie soundtracks. But the Los Angeles smog aggravated his allergies, so the family returned and built a home outside Jeannette in 1948, when Mario was 24.

Sam Pugliano, who hosts a Sunday polka music show on WKHB-AM, said Mr. Mosti's rendition of "The Flight of the Bumblebee" was memorable.

"He played that better than I ever heard anybody play it. That's a fast one," Mr. Pugliano said.

Marylynne Pitz : mpitz@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1648.

First published on August 7, 2011 at 3:24 pm