

Sunday

OBITUARY

Jules Herman, big-band leader

Bandsman shaped area's music scene

BY MARICELLA MIRANDA
Pioneer Press

Local musician Jules Herman led the big-band music scene in the Twin Cities for decades, filling the former Prom and Bel Rae ballrooms with music, dancers and fans. A piece of Minnesota music history was lost when he died of heart failure Friday at his Mendota Heights home. He was 93.

A farm boy originally from North Dakota, Herman joined the big-band era in 1935 as first trumpet in the Lawrence Welk band. He created his own group, which became the house band at the Prom Ballroom in St. Paul for 35 years. He was inducted into the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame in 2002.

"Jules was a fine commercial bandsman, a leader," said Bill Schneider, 84, a former promotions director for the Pioneer Press and local swing musician who played at the Prom Ballroom.

Schneider, Herman and other area big-band musicians

used to meet for lunch regularly to talk about the old times when there was "good" music. Herman would reminisce about when he met his wife, Lois, another big-band musician, and his days with Lawrence Welk.

"Jules had a ton of stories," Schneider said. "The type of thing that we did is fading away so fast. It will be one less musician."

Lois Herman said it was a shock when the doctors told her that her husband recently had two heart attacks, which he didn't tell anyone about. He was diagnosed with heart failure and given a short time to live.

"I don't think he was ready to go," Lois Herman said. "To the very end, he really wanted more time. He didn't want to leave me, and he didn't want to leave our three daughters."

The two met in 1938 in Pittsburgh, her hometown. Welk and Herman went to listen to Lois Herman, known then as Lois V. Best, sing at a club. Welk hired her, and she became the original "cham-

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pagne lady," singing songs known for their upbeat and bubbly tones.

Jules Herman was the 20-year-old's chaperon. They fell in love and got married within six months. They eventually left the band and settled in Chicago where they started a family. He joined the Griff Williams group and the Wayne King band, playing at the famous Palmer House in Chicago.

In 1950, Jules Herman started his own band and later moved to St. Paul to perform at the Prom Ballroom. His wife joined the group. Herman also was the Vikings' bandleader for eight years.

After the Prom closed in 1986, the group continued playing around town until its mem-

bers retired in 1996. During his last years, Herman enjoyed tending his 1-acre yard and spending time with his family.

Lois Herman said she will miss her soul mate, whom she experienced everything with. But most of all, she's going to miss the music they made together.

"I'm not going to be able to listen to music for a while," she said. "That would hurt. It's beautiful, but too sad. I suppose I'll just be grieving the music."

In addition to his wife, Herman is survived by daughters Bonnie Herman of Chicago, Gloria Aberman of Las Vegas and Debra Herman of Mendota Heights, and four grandchildren.

Funeral services will be noon Tuesday at St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, 460 W. Annapolis St. in West St. Paul. Visitation will begin two hours before the service at the church. Herman will be buried at Acacia Cemetery in Mendota Heights.

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burgh. He ran a contest to name his newly written theme song, "Bubbles in the Wine," and shortly after, the names Champagne Music and Champagne Lady were invented. A singer named Lois Best became Welk's first Champagne Lady, and before the year was out, she also became Mrs. Jules Herman.

"Lawrence didn't like it very well," said Lois Herman, because he didn't want married couples in the orchestra. But he came around.

"Lawrence didn't have much of an education, so he grew to depend on Jules because he was the only college grad in the band," she said.

In 1940, when the Welk orchestra finished an engagement in Chicago and left for California, the Hermans stayed behind to raise their family.

When the United States entered World War II, Jules tried to get into the military as an officer, but he wasn't accepted. He spent the war years working in a Chicago-area defense plant by day and playing trumpet by night for the Griff Williams society band at the Empire Room of the Palmer House. Later he joined Wayne King, the waltz king, before forming his own band toward the end of the 1940s.

At the Prom

After stints at a ballroom in Joplin, Mo., and the Oaks in Winona, Minn., Herman accepted an invitation to head the house orchestra at the Prom, and the family moved to the Twin Cities in 1950.

For the next 35 years, the Jules Herman orchestra played the Prom. The 11-piece group always included his wife on the Hammond organ.

"It wasn't featured greatly, but it made the band sound bigger," Lois Herman said.

They fronted for stars on their way up who came through St. Paul: Pat

Trumpeter Jules Herman, shown in 1967, led the orchestra at the Prom Ballroom in St. Paul for 35 years.

Boone, Connie Francis and Bobby Darin. They backed the Four Lads, the Four Preps and the Four Freshmen. Sometimes they played their music first and then made way for stars such as Nancy Wilson and Louis Armstrong.

Their music wasn't quite jazz and it wasn't quite swing, "but it was very danceable," Lois Herman said. In the late 1960s, about 800 people were coming out every Sunday night.

The bigger part of the orchestra's business came from playing private parties. Herman also led the Minnesota Vikings football band for eight years, ending in 1982, the first season in the Metrodome.

The band's last engagement was a Valentine's Day dance in 1996 at the University of Minnesota.

"The check bounced," Lois Herman said. "That was really funny, to think that was your last night in the business." However, the problem was merely confusion on the part of the student committee; the band did get paid for the gig.

Herman was inducted into the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame in 2002, and his trumpet resides at the Minnesota Historical Society.

In addition to Lois Herman, survivors include daughters Bonnie Herman of Chicago, Gloria Aberman of Las Vegas and Debra Herman of Mendota Heights; four grandchildren, and a brother, Erling Herman.

Services will be held at noon Tuesday at St. James Lutheran Church, 460 Annapolis St. at Cherokee Avenue., West St. Paul. Visitation is at 10 a.m.

*Trudi Hahn is at
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OBITUARIES

Orchestra leader Jules Herman dies

By Trudi Hahn
Star Tribune Staff Writer



Herman, Jules A.

Age 93 - Orchestra Leader

Jules Herman Orchestra

Preceded in death by son Joel; and grand-daughter Juliet Aberman; 2 brothers Pat and Larry. Beloved husband of Lois for 66 years. Dear father of Bonnie (Tom Radtke) Herman, Chicago IL, Gloria (Dr. David) Aberman, Las Vegas NV, Debra Herman, Mendota Heights. Grandfather of Emily, Matthew, Jonathan and Lucy. Brother of Erling Herman. Funeral service Tuesday July 26, 2005 at Noon at ST. JAMES LUTHERAN CHURCH, Cherokee at Annapolis, W. St. Paul. Visitation 10AM-Noon at the Church. Private family interment Acacia Park Cemetery. Memorials preferred to St. James Lutheran Church. Member of the Musicians Union in Chicago and St. Paul. Special thanks to HealthEast Hospice. The Jules Herman Orchestra performed at the Prom Center for over 35 years, also orchestra leader for the Vikings under Max Winter for 8 years. He joined the Lawrence Welk Orchestra as First Trumpet in 1935. During WWII played at the Palmer House "Empire Room" in Chicago with the Griff Williams Orchestra. Arr. THE JOHNSON PETERSON FUNERAL HOME, (651-222-3220) johnsonpeterson.com.

Jules Herman, who played a sweet trumpet in front of his own orchestra for 35 years at the Prom Ballroom in St. Paul, died Friday of heart failure at his home in Mendota Heights. He was 93.

He learned to play trumpet as "a 100 percent Norwegian" kid in Milnor, N.D., said his wife, Lois, and studied music education at Moorhead State College.

After receiving his degree in the early 1930s, he taught music in Gardner, N.D., but quit after eight months when a fellow North Dakotan, Lawrence Welk, asked Herman to join his orchestra, which played regularly at radio station WNAX in Yankton, S.D.

By 1938 the Welk orchestra was touring nationally and landed in Pittsburgh. He ran a contest to name his newly written theme song, "Bubbles in the Wine," and shortly after, the names Champagne Music and Champagne Lady were invented. A singer named Lois Best became Welk's first Champagne Lady, and before the year was out, she also became Mrs. Jules Herman.

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Star Tribune file

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