

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT – BILL HICKS

For Bill Hicks, an AFM member for over 40 years, there was never a question about what he wanted to do for a living growing up in Lorain, Ohio. He wanted to play trumpet at the highest level and with the best musicians in the country.

Knowing that he had to get from his sleepy hometown on the shores of Lake Erie to Los Angeles to fulfill this dream, he joined the U.S. Army following graduation from Clearview High School. He got a commitment from his recruiter for a posting as a musician at Fort McArthur in San Pedro, passing up more prestigious postings in the east, so that he could be close to and learn from the elite studio musicians in the L.A. area.



In addition to his ceremonial duties with the 72nd U.S. Army Band from 1970 to 1973, he played first chair in the concert band and lead with the post dance band. But there was never a doubt that when his enlistment was over he would try his hand as a professional performer.

After his honorable discharge, he joined L.A. Local 47 and began playing with rehearsal bands and orchestras. Like any musician trying to make a living, he took just about anything he could get; Latin bands, weddings, club dates, Disneyland, recording, big bands.



Bill (Center) With Harry James The King of Brass,” regarded among the top players and instructors around. Bill remembers, “I was warming up with some exercises from the Gordon method. Someone asked me if I wanted to meet Claude. He was studying with him and took me to his next lesson.”

That meeting was a turning point in Bill’s professional life. He began studying trumpet with Gordon and continued for 17 years. He credits the “Systematic Approach to Daily Practice,” taught the correct way by its author, with developing his playing to the elusive “next level.”

As his skills became known, he got more work, eventually landing a job as lead trumpet with the Harry James Orchestra in 1976.

In the three years that followed, he toured and played with some of the biggest names in show business. He also played with the Bob Crosby, Alvino Rey, Jimmy Dorsey, and Ray Anthony bands. [Click here for a listing of Bill’s professional playing credits.](#)

It was in the late 80’s that work began to dry up in Los Angeles and Bill began looking for something different. His wife at the time was from Central Pennsylvania and in 1987 they moved to Harrisburg. Bill joined the Harrisburg Local (serving on its executive board for many years) and quickly became known in the area. He played in pit orchestras for national Broadway touring companies at the Hershey Theatre and in the house band at the American Music Theatre. He free lanced with other area bands (like Dave Stahl and Zim Zimarel) and began teaching private lessons. He currently plays with Rob Stonebeck.

In 1990, he bought Big Band Nostalgia from Ed Felty (Lebanon Local) and founded Big Band Nostalgia Productions, operating four bands with a variety of genres: Big Band Nostalgia, [2nd Avenue Swing Riot](#), Combo Nostalgia, and Bill Hicks Brass.

Although he is best known as a big band and show band performer, he is an accomplished classical player and a brilliant soloist. [\(Click here for audio clips.\)](#)

Bill now lives in Denver, PA and is a member of Local 294 taking freelance jobs and teaching the Claude Gordon Method to students, professionals, and “comeback players” in his studio and on Skype. [\(Click here for website\).](#)