

## And...Don't Forget the Pasta

By Georgette Twain

Frank Vodich, was a dedicated banjo player, teacher, arranger and most assuredly, a humanitarian. He was a special, wonderful man that I first met at the Sacramento Banjo-Rama in 1966.

Born February 14, 1915, first generation Yugoslavian, in Miami, Arizona, where he and his brother Anthony were the only siblings in the family. In 1926, he began banjo lessons from Mr. Anderson. In a few years, the Vodich family moved to San Francisco for more lucrative opportunities in employment and in education for the boys. Frank made San Francisco his home for the rest of his life and considered himself a native of that city. Indeed he was.

By the time the 1930s rolled around, his interest turned to boxing. He earned his Golden Gloves and soon after became a professional winning 29 bouts, then hung up his gloves for good.

During WWII, he was employed by Kaiser shipyards as a supervisor to the steam fitters. His membership in that union, local #38, spanned over fifty years. After the war, Frank met and married Georgia Stafros and remained married for 58 years. They had two daughters, Carol and Valerie. Eventually both girls became talented pianists.

Frank belonged to several service clubs—the San Francisco Shriners, where another banjo player attended. That member was Eddie Peabody. Frank and Eddie became staunch friends and spent many an afternoon playing duets, Frank on melody and Eddie on harmony.

From the 1960s into the 1990s, he became active in the San Francisco Banjo Club. Georgia and Frank were ardent Banjo-Rama fans. He was requested many times to solo, but his shyness prevented that. He was a fine banjoist and would have been a plus anywhere.

Hundreds of banjo players studied through the years with him and he never charged anyone for a lesson, whether one could afford to or not. He once gave one of his Vega banjos to a talented boy whose parents could not manage to buy one. At this point, let me say something in the unique way of having his student quickly and easily memorize a certain passage that may seem difficult. He recorded the passage, repeating it over and over, halfway through the cassette. He then explained by playing along with the cassette in this manner, without stopping once, at practice time, every day for one week. You never forgot it the rest of your "banjo" life.

Because of all his years as an athlete, he possessed amazing stamina, and as a young student may tire, after two hours of strenuous banjo playing, Frank was as fresh as at the beginning of the session. He was full of surprise and never let anyone leave from home without something. That something usually was a package or two of pasta. (He had a friend who owned a spaghetti factory. Nearly every banjo player left his studio carrying loads of spaghetti. I guess he thought all banjo players were poor and starving...maybe some were.) Also, after a lesson, Georgia's voice was heard loud and clear at the top of the stairway, "Yoo-hoo, are there any hungry banjo players down there? Lunch is served." They were the most gracious, hospitable hosts and those of us who were lucky enough to have known them shall cherish those memories always.



Frank Vodich and Eddie Peabody

Some years ago, I was packing up my banjo, about to leave when Frank handed me the pasta and a cassette. "Georgette, go home and listen to this piano player and tell me who it is." I did and I called Frank and said, "No, I don't know who it is. Whoever it is, he must be a saloon type of piano player." "Well, it's Eddie Peabody," Frank answered. So, I have in my collection of Peabody's recordings, a rare one recorded in Frank's studio—Peabody on piano!

My very last visit to the Vodich home took place in 2001 and it was our last hurrah, so to speak. We strummed "Who," from "Sunny" and "Dark Eyes," Eddie's rendition. After lunch, I gathered my package of pasta, started to say good-bye. Frank didn't say a word, but crossed the studio room and took down from a shelf, a figure of a golden angel came over and said, "I want you to have her, besides, she plays the banjo." Perhaps he meant her to be my guardian angel? I thank you Frank, for being you.

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*Editor's note: Frank Vodich had many banjo students including Brad Roth and Scotty Plummer. Georgette Twain recalls that Frank Vodich was very proud of Brad Roth and thinks that he (Vodich), saw himself in Brad Roth, as a youth. He also wrote arrangements for Scott Plummer's shows with Liberace. Frank Vodich passed away June, 2005.*

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