



Kappa Kappa Psi - Alpha Rho

Woody Herman



Born: 1913

Initiated into Alpha Rho: 27 March 1983, Green Country Jazz Festival

Died: 1987

American clarinet and saxophone player and bandleader, who for more than 50 years led one of the most consistently popular and artistically innovative big bands in jazz. Herman organized and sustained a large ensemble of talented musicians through periods of economic hardship while remaining dedicated to producing new expressions of jazz.

Born Woodrow Charles Herman in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he worked as a vaudeville performer during his teenage years. In 1934 he joined the dance band of American saxophonist and bandleader Isham Jones in Chicago. Working primarily as a singer, Herman absorbed the high musical standards and professionalism of Jones. When the group disbanded in 1936, Herman formed a new ensemble using many of the same players. In 1939 the group recorded its first hit instrumental, *Woodchopper's Ball*, which eventually sold more than 1 million copies.

By 1945 Herman's band had combined the light, crisp style of the big band of American pianist Count Basie with the progressive talents of American composers and arrangers Ralph Burns and Neal Hefti, who were members of Herman's band. As a result, the group became one of the earliest and most successful big bands to incorporate the newly emerging style of jazz called bebop. Known as Herman's Herd (later the First Herd), this group featured such influential American musicians as drummer Dave Tough, trombonist Bill Harris, and saxophonist Flip Phillips and achieved prominence in 1945 with recordings such as "Apple Honey," "Caldonia," and "Northwest Passage." Impressed by Herman and his group, Russian-born American composer Igor Stravinsky composed for them the *Ebony Concerto*, a significant departure from the traditional big-band repertoire, which the band premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1946. In 1947 Herman recorded the classic piece "Four Brothers," featuring the outstanding saxophone section of Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward, and Serge Chaloff. The Ralph Burns composition "Early Autumn" (1948), featuring the solo improvisation of Getz, is another of the Herman band's classic recordings.

Herman toured with various musicians (later bands were known by such names as the Third Herd, the Swinging Herd, and the Thundering Herd) from the 1950s to the 1980s. An excellent judge of young talent, he continued to employ first-rate musicians, many of whom went on to become influential artists themselves, including vibraphonist Milt Jackson, trombonist Carl Fontana, trumpeter Bill Chase, and saxophonist Al Cohn. While Herman continued to perform his early hit songs, he also strove to remain contemporary and stylistically varied. He recorded music by a variety of composers, including Americans Henry Mancini, Chick Corea, and Charles Mingus, and the British rock group the Beatles.