

# LESSON IN LIVING

## MILANO ACCORDION HISTORY

Elma Allen Milano

Milano Accordion History began with Henri's father, Francesco Milano, who left his humble home and family in the village of Forno Rivera, Italy to travel to Le Havre, Seine-Inferior, France, where he embarked on the French ship, "La Savoie," and sailed for the United States in search of a better life. He landed at Ellis Island, New York on February 1, 1908.

Francesco was 23-years-old at this time. Included in his allowable baggage was his used, but treasured, sixty-bass, double-keyboard piano accordion that he had previously purchased in Italy. Since Francesco was fluent in both reading music and playing the accordion, it is assumed that he had studied in Forno Rivera, Italy. He traveled by train to his place of employment as a tool-repair blacksmith in Sunnyside, Carbon County, Utah. He later married Leontina Pascal, a 17-year-old beauty from Pinasca Pinerola, Italy, who braved the sea on the ship, "La Province."

In 1920, Francesco ordered a new 140-bass piano accordion from the Guerrini Accordion Manufacturing Company in San Francisco, California. His ultimate dream came true when he received this fantastic instrument. Later on, due to a labor strike between coal miners and management, he decided to move his wife and three children, Anna, Henri, and Mary, to Salt Lake City, Utah.

Enrico (Henri "Hank") Milano was born July 14, 1916 in Sunnyside, Utah. His music career began at an early age, studying the violin and later progressing to his true love, the piano accordion. His father was his first instructor and role model. Mr. Edward Ferlan, of Salt Lake City, was his next teacher. Ed Ferlan had started his accordion study with Francesco, and later advanced to music education, harmony, and theory, with instructors in San Francisco, California. He was also affiliated with the Guerrini Accordion Manufacturing Company, performing on a Guerrini instrument.

In 1931, Hank's parents purchased a new special Piatanesi accordion for him from Mr. Sam Pezzopane, who was a local accordion teacher and factory representative for the Piatanesi Accordion Manufacturing Company, of Chicago, Illinois. Hank did most of his teaching and performing in Salt Lake City and Los Angeles with this beautiful instrument.

In 1935, Hank and his buddy, I.J. (Izzie) Wagner, drove to Los Angeles, California, in an old 1927 Pontiac to test opportunities in the big city. Here, Hank met Ken Howell and Tony Aretta, of the Howell-Aretta Conservatory of Music. They immediately hired him as an accordion instructor. Ken Howell was a musical genius. He masterminded the Howell-Aretta Accordion Instruction Course and was also in demand as an arranger for the Hollywood movie studios. He was instrumental in Hank's interest in music theory and arranging for the accordion. Hank was later promoted to treasurer and general manager of Howell-Aretta.

While working here, he met and married Elma Allen, who was a professional accordionist and receptionist. Before Howell-Aretta closed, Ken, Tony, Henri, and Elma, teamed as an accordion quartet and performed in the area. After Howell-Aretta closed, Henri and Elma opened Milano Accordion Studios in Southern California, where they taught several hundred students until Hank was inducted into the army. After World War II, they moved to Mesa, Arizona, where they opened Milano Music Center. As each of their six children turned five-years-old, Elma began teaching them to play the accordion. Thus, while the rest of the family kept busy practicing, winning awards, and giving service, Hank kept busy building their music business into one of the largest and most successful in the state.

In early 1961, Hank and Elma dissolved their marriage. It was an amicable decision with Elma and their children, Frank, Francene, Mila, Laura, Margaret, and Ida, continuing on

with Milano Music Center in Mesa, and Hank returning to Salt Lake City to care for Francesco, his ailing father who was now a widower.

While in SLC, Hank assessed other business areas and became acquainted with Lincoln White, president of the FAIM Membership Discount Store. Mr. White offered Hank a position as his assistant. About this time, Mr. Joe Romagnoli, of the Italo-American Accordion Company contacted Hank and persuaded him to start teaching again. He offered to consign accordions to him for selling. Hank decided to do this as a limited sideline to his FAIM position and soon he was teaching about a dozen or so students.

He subsequently held positions of trust in the music industry. First, he worked as national sales manager for the Estey Musical Instrument Corporation (manufacturers of organs and the popular Magnatone amplifier) that was located in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Later, he became sales manager for General Electro Music Inc., (GEM) of New York and Italy.

Hank had married Connie Fresh in 1964 and in early 1970 they decided to leave their home in Zelienople, Pennsylvania and move back to Salt Lake City with their two children, Nicholas and Alexandria. They enjoyed being back in Utah where he teamed up with Izzie and Abe Wagner in the packaging supply division of Wagner Corporation as vice president and general manager. The business was sold in 1993 and Hank retired at 77 years-of-age on August 31st, of the same year.

In 1996, in celebration of Milano Music Center's fiftieth anniversary, Hank joined the Mesa Milanos in performing again as "*the world's largest family of virtuoso accordionists.*" As the eight of them performed, even though the tunes were no longer of a virtuoso caliber, both performers and listeners shed many tears of joy.

Today, Frank and his son, Mike, operate Milano Music Center. Mila and her husband, John, and their son, Jim, operate Linton Milano Music. Together, they enjoy a high degree of success as a complete music outlet, which offers school service, keyboards, skilled repairs, top-brand merchandise, a complete selection of sheet music, and bulges with students who are taught by qualified instructors.

After a long absence from the accordion, Frank taught himself to play the chromatic accordion. He entertains several times a year with his large repertoire of favorites. Sometimes, he teams as a duet with his senior-citizen mother, Elma.

Milano Music houses a showcase of family memorabilia including their accordions. The studio walls are adorned with family pictures which customers enjoy. Their historical setting establishes a relationship of trust.

In 2003, Hank's daughters drove to Salt Lake City to visit Hank on his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday. While there, Margaret filmed her daddy performing on his accordion. Even after a 30-year hiatus, he still thrilled them with his unique style and arrangements. This video will help preserve his accordion skills for posterity to enjoy.

*P.S. Strange as it may seem, even though Hank's father, Uncle Tony, sister Mary, wife Elma, her grandmother Allen, and all six of their children enjoyed the accordion, not one of their 30 grandchildren shows any interest even though they play other instruments both as an avocation and as a vocation. (Grandson Tom Linton is a member of the popular "Jimmy Eat World" rock band.) Perhaps some of their 20 (and growing) great-grandchildren will turn this around?*

*This was written in 2003, when Elma was 83-years-old. She formerly belonged to the Mesa City Council, the National Speakers Association, operated Milano Music, taught music for sixty years, and has given years of service to her family, her church, and her community. She loves people and hopes to lift lives. The entire Lesson in Living series may be found on [lintonmilano.com](http://lintonmilano.com).*