

William F. Ludwig II

by Billy Jeansonne

William F. Ludwig, Jr. was born on September 13, 1916 at the Robert Burns Hospital (now gone) in Chicago, Illinois to the parents of William F. Ludwig, Sr. (who along with his brother established the Ludwig & Ludwig Drum Company in 1909) and Elsa Maria Gunkler. William Jr. had one sister, Bettie Ludwig, born in 1920. In 1922 the family built a three story brick colonial house at 1001 Maple Street in Evanston, Illinois.



Bill Jr.'s playing career began when he was 8 years old. His father brought home a practice pad mounted on a drum stand, a big instruction book and a huge pair of drumsticks. His drum lessons were to begin immediately. He was to practice every night after having supper. Bill Sr. had to "influence" his son to practice. It didn't take young Bill long to progress, but he worked very hard at it. Practicing on the drum pad was somewhat boring to young Bill not to mention, quote "I was getting sick of the smell of gum rubber and to this day I still hate it." He asked his dad for a drum. His dad turned him down, saying he had to learn more rudiments before he would bring home a drum.

Bill Ludwig, Jr. attended Elkhart High School in Elkhart, Indiana then moved to Oak Park-River Forest High School in Oak Park, Illinois. He later attended the University of Illinois, where he played drums on weekends making \$ 4.00 a night.

In 1938 William Ludwig, Jr. co-founded, along with his father, the W.F.L. Drum Company. The company was located at 1728 North Damen Ave. in Chicago. William Jr. became the Sales and Advertising manager for the W.F.L. Drum Company and also did drum clinics. He also designed his first Ludwig catalog in 1939 known as "Big Red" because it had a red cover. His second catalog was the 1940 catalog with a green cover. Both had Ray Bauduc of Dixieland fame on the cover.

In May of 1942 he was drafted into the Navy and went to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in North Chicago and was welcomed by an old Ludwig & Ludwig banjo artist, Lt. Eddie Peabody. Bill Jr. was a Chief Petty Officer and trained drummers to perform in 12 drum corps. His stay lasted until 1945.



He also designed the 1947 W.F.L. drum catalog with a picture of Buddy Rich on the front cover. The 1947 catalog also contained the new Classic line of lug casings.

In 1970, William F. Ludwig, Jr. became President of the Ludwig Drum company. The 1980 catalog was the last Ludwig catalog written by Mr. Ludwig. He sold the company to Selmer in 1981 and Ludwig Industries was moved to Monroe, North Carolina three years later.

Mr. Ludwig is very active today demonstrating his slide presentation "A History of Percussion" which he developed. He also attends numerous drum functions and is a very active participant at most of the vintage and custom drum shows and national drum meets.

If you've ever wondered what his favorite snare drum is, why am I not surprised, the famous #400 Supra Phonic. This model became famous because of the secret slope to the snare side. The angle of this slope is still secret and is responsible for its fast action.

Two of the earliest drums in the William F. Ludwig collection consists of a 1911 4 x 15 snare drum and a 1912 6.5 x 14 snare, both of which were owned by William Ludwig, Sr. The collection also consists of rope tension drums from 1841 to rod drums from 1898 to the present. His favorite Ludwig finish is Marine Pearl. This was the first pearl ever produced by the Dupont Co. in 1928. When it was introduced by Ludwig & Ludwig it was called "Avalon Pearl". This finish was and still is the best seller.



Mr. Ludwig is one of the nicest and sincerest men I have ever met. As a teenager spending countless hours, days, and years looking over 60's Ludwig catalogs and seeing Mr. Ludwig's picture, I never imagined that one day I would meet him and come to know him. I respect him immensely and what he has done for the world of drums is immeasurable. He stands very tall in my book. Thanks, Mr. Ludwig.