

= Elmo Tanner =

William Elmo Tanner , known as Elmo Tanner (August 8 , 1904 ? December 20 , 1990) was an American whistler , singer , bandleader and disc jockey , best known for his whistling on the chart @-@ topping song ? Heartaches ? with the Ted Weems Orchestra . Tanner and Weems recorded the song for two different record companies within a period of five years . Neither recording was successful originally . The song became a hit for both record companies after a Charlotte , North Carolina disk jockey played it at random in 1947 .

Tanner was originally hired by Weems as a vocalist ; the bandleader discovered Tanner 's whistling ability while the band was traveling to an engagement . Like Bing Crosby , he was able to whistle from his throat due to the muscles in his larynx . He subsequently became a featured performer as a whistler , earning the nicknames " Whistler ? s Mother ? s Boy " , " The Whistling Troubador , " and " the nation ? s best @-@ known whistler " . He began appearing in films as part of the Ted Weems Orchestra in 1936 ; his first film role was in The Hatfields and McCoys , and he later appeared in the movie Swing , Sister , Swing (1938) and the musical film short , Swing Frolic (1942) . Weems considered Tanner 's whistling important enough to his orchestra that in 1939 he insured Tanner 's throat for \$ 10 @, @ 000 . Besides musical whistling , he also imitated birds for Disney .

After a failed attempt at running a restaurant in his native Nashville in the early 1950s , he toured with the Elmo Tanner Quartet until 1958 , when he found work as a disc jockey in Florida . After working as an auto dealer in the 1960s , in the early 1970s he resumed musical activity , singing with a St. Petersburg , Florida @-@ based quartet .

= = Early life = =

Tanner was born on August 8 , 1904 in Nashville , Tennessee . He grew up in Detroit , and moved to Memphis with his family by 1926 . As a young boy , Tanner studied the violin and was successful with it until eye trouble made it difficult for him to read notes . His musical training helped Tanner to develop the ability to scan music or lyrics quickly and then either sing or whistle what he had just read . On his walk home from work , Tanner passed a cemetery each night and started whistling as he passed by . Not everyone appreciated Tanner 's whistling in the evening ; he was once jailed in Albuquerque , New Mexico for whistling after 10pm . A graduate of the University of Tennessee , Tanner raced automobiles and worked as a mechanic in Memphis . While performing the duties of his employment he liked to whistle and sing . One day in 1928 , he had a repair job for a customer who happened to work at WMC radio . After hearing Tanner singing while working on his car , the announcer suggested Tanner audition for the radio station . His consequent on @-@ air appearance brought a call from Paramount Records , which had offices in Chicago .

= = Career = =

By the late 1920s , Elmo Tanner had moved to the Chicago area and had established himself as a professional musician . Although Elmo Tanner never gained a large reputation as a singer , he was occasionally featured as such with Weems . It was as a vocalist that he made his initial recordings . He recorded a few dozen sides as a soloist for Paramount and Vocalion in 1927 through 1929 . Interestingly , the Paramount discs appeared in the Race record series , and the Vocalion sides were likewise marketed to African Americans . His versatility was noted by Vocalion , who utilized him to provide vocals for jazz outfits such as Jimmie Noone and for more sedate recordings with the Victor Young orchestra and with organist Eddie House . Not having signed an exclusive contract with any recording company , he was able to appear on the prestigious Victor label with Nathaniel Shilkret . In 1928 he formed a duet with Fred Rose as " The Tune Peddlers " and appeared on radio stations WLS , KYW , and WBBM .

While working at KYW with Rose , Tanner received an offer from Ted Weems . Weems offered a higher salary than Tanner was making at the radio station , but Tanner was hesitant because the job with Weems involved substantial travel . The KYW station manager offered to match the \$ 50 per

week salary . A few days later , Weems made a higher offer which was met by the station manager 's offer to match it . This continued until only Fred Rose came to work . When he arrived , Rose told the station manager that Weems now offered Tanner \$ 100 a week and he had accepted it .

= = = Ted Weems Orchestra and ? Heartaches ? = = =

Tanner joined the Ted Weems band as a singer in 1929 and became a prominent feature of the group . Tanner 's whistling talent was unveiled by accident . In high spirits on their way to their next performance , the band members were singing , yelling and whistling on the bus . When Tanner joined in , Weems was impressed enough to add a whistling segment to one of the band 's sets . Tanner whistled the Show Boat song , " Make Believe " ; the audience asked for an encore . Tanner 's whistling became so popular that Perry Como , another featured performer in the band , said ? The whistler was the whole band . ? On occasion , Tanner 's lips would pucker up , interfering with his whistling . Although generally noted for his graciousness as a bandleader , Weems would have fun at Tanner 's expense , running him through the most difficult songs in his repertoire when he noticed Tanner was struggling . Tanner became known as " Whistler 's Mother 's Boy " , " The Whistling Troubador , " and " the nation 's best @-@ known whistler " . Tanner was noted for the ease with which he hit high notes and performed trills . He had the ability to whistle while triple @-@ tonguing , and like Bing Crosby , he was able to whistle from his throat due to the muscles in his larynx . His range was from low G to high B ? . Professional whistler Joel Brandon has named Tanner as a " top pick " . Ted Weems considered Tanner 's whistling so important to his band , he insured the musician 's throat with Lloyd 's of London for \$ 10 @,@ 000 in 1939 . The policy provided payment for any medical expenses related to Tanner 's possible inability to whistle and included payment to the holder if Tanner was unable to perform .

In an era when whistling was commonly featured on popular recordings , Tanner was often confused with Fred Lowery , who was blind and worked with Horace Heidt and his Musical Knights . People would come up to Tanner and ask if it was true that he was blind . ? Only on Saturday night , ? he would reply . When not singing or whistling , Elmo played guitar in the band . The primary purpose was evidently to show Tanner was " doing something " while keeping him in view , as it became a standard joke that the guitar he was playing had rubber bands in place of strings .

Tanner began appearing in films as part of the Ted Weems Orchestra in 1936 ; his first film role was in The Hatfields and McCoys , In 1938 he appeared in the movie Swing , Sister , Swing with the Weems outfit . Tanner also featured with Ted Weems and his Orchestra in a 1942 musical film short , Swing Frolic . During this time period Tanner appeared on the popular radio show Beat the Band with Weems ; the program ran from January 28 , 1940 until February 23 , 1941 .

Tanner , Ted Weems , and the rest of his orchestra joined the Merchant Marine in 1942 . At (and intermittently before) his discharge in 1944 he pursued a solo career . He headlined in various nightclubs and theaters such as Chicago 's Oriental and Colosimo 's and at the Orpheum in Los Angeles alongside the King Sisters and Maurice Rocco . Besides musical whistling , he also imitated birds for Disney . He continued to perform songs that were associated with Weems , such as ? Nola ? . Tanner announced he would be fronting a twelve @-@ piece band in September 1946 ; the band 's theme was " Heartaches " . He took over the Andy Anderson unit that was based in Atlanta and signed on with the William Morris Agency . His orchestra featured his whistling and vocals by Carol Bridges . However , this proved to be short @-@ lived because of the surprise success of an old recording .

= = = The delayed success of " Heartaches " = = =

? Heartaches ? , composed by Al Hoffman and John Klenner in 1931 , was recorded as an unusual half @-@ rumba , half washboard rhythm . In 1933 , Victor had assigned the recording of the song to Ted Weems and his Orchestra , and wanted it recorded quickly . Weems and his band had time for only one rehearsal before recording the song . Initially , Weems did not like the song ; he decided to omit the lyrics by way of having Tanner whistle instead . While running through the song at

rehearsal , someone thought of trying it with a speedier tempo than initially written . It was not a large seller , and the master was filed away . In 1938 , Weems was now working with Decca Records and was preparing to make another record . When someone had forgotten to assign a song for the " B " side of the record , Weems and Tanner made another recording of " Heartaches " ; the Decca version was not any more successful than the Victor one had been five years earlier .

In 1947 , a young disk jockey in Charlotte , North Carolina who worked the overnight shift had recently received some older records which he brought to work with him . He chose one at random and put it on the turntable . Shortly after the record had finished , the radio station 's telephones began ringing with people asking about the song and requesting to hear it again . By afternoon , the city 's music stores were calling the radio station , hoping to learn where they could order copies of " Heartaches " . Both Victor and Decca went into their vaults to find their masters of the record and began pressing them for southern United States sales . As disk jockeys in other parts of the US began obtaining copies of the record and playing it , the demand for " Heartaches " went from coast to coast . This older recording went to the top of all the main charts in 1947 , including sales , juke box play , and airplay .

Unusually , two separate recordings were given equal credit in the charts . Victor 's version was recorded on August 4 , 1933 and issued on Bluebird B5131 . Decca 's recording was made on August 23 , 1938 and originally appeared on catalog number 2020B . The hit records were credited to RCA Victor 20 @-@ 2175 and Decca 25017 , respectively . Altogether the recordings were credited with selling 8 @.@ 5 million copies . Tanner said in a 1960 interview that neither he nor Ted Weems received any compensation for the " Heartaches " re @-@ issue as they both had let the contracts on the song expire while they were in the Merchant Marine . Tanner and Weems missed collecting an estimated \$ 250 @,@ 000 in royalties because of the expired contracts .

Because of the renewed success of " Heartaches " , Tanner joined the re @-@ formed Weems outfit in March 1947 , and both were signed to Mercury Records . This later outfit often received poor reviews , with the exception of Elmo 's outstanding whistling ; it was Tanner 's whistling that audiences most responded to . Tanner made one more recording of " Heartaches " in 1953 with Billy Vaughn for Dot Records .

= = = Later life = = =

Tanner left Weems in 1950 to open a restaurant in Nashville . This occupied him for a year and a half , but it proved to be a failure and Tanner suffered financially . He formed the Elmo Tanner Quartet and resumed touring for the next few years , until , tired of travel , he broke up his group in Seattle in 1958 . He spent the next fourteen months in Birmingham as a disk jockey and leading a musical combo . He reunited briefly with Weems , then settled in the St. Petersburg , Florida area in Treasure Island . In 1959 , Tanner began working as a disc jockey on radio station WILZ in St. Pete Beach , Florida , a position which lasted several years . During this time he continued to make recordings with orchestras such as David Carroll and Billy Vaughn to continued positive reviews . His association continued with Weems , making the occasional guest appearance with the band he was closely connected to . In the early 1960s , Tanner was also selling Datsuns at a local St. Petersburg auto dealership . In the early 1970s he resumed musical activity , singing with a St. Petersburg @-@ based quartet .

= = Personal life and death = =

In 1936 , while Tanner was living in Chicago , he was divorced from his first wife , Verne . Tanner married Eleanor Jones of Birmingham on January 31 , 1939 in Indianapolis . While playing an engagement with Weems , Tanner got his marriage license between the first and second acts on the bill , bought a wedding ring between the second and third acts and was married between the third and fourth acts . He met his second wife while working with the Weems band on Catalina Island . They had four children together : Elmo Jr . , twins Margaret and Patricia , and John Emmet . By 1969 he was retired . Tanner underwent gall bladder surgery in 1985 and was able to recover at his

home in St. Petersburg . He died on December 20 , 1990 in St. Petersburg , Florida . Tanner is buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery , Nashville , Tennessee . He was posthumously inducted into the Whistlers ' Hall of Fame in 1991 , joining previous inductees Bing Crosby and Fred Lowery .

= = Discography = =