

# ALTO TATUM

Alto Tatum, son of a Baptist minister, was born February 19, 1912 in Timpson, Texas. When he was a young boy the family moved to Ft. Worth where his father continued his ministry. Alto was educated in Ft. Worth where he began studying cornet with a violinist by the name of Medsker. Most of his early playing was in the R.O.T.C. band. He graduated from Texas Christian University with a bachelor and master degree in history and philosophy. He played in the band and orchestra and upon graduation became a trumpet player in the Ft. Worth symphony orchestra.

MORGAN,  
TX ←

HE STARTED  
SCHOOL IN  
Timpson, Tx.

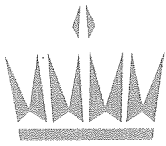
→ 1933 WHEN HE SERVED AS ASSISTANT B.D. at  
T.C.U.

His band directing career began in 1934 when he organized one of the first bands in East Texas at rural East Mountain High School in Upshur county near Gilmer and Gladewater. He moved to the oil field boom town of Gladewater in 1937 where he developed one of the best school band programs in the state. His Gladewater High School Band received national recognition and was for years considered to be "East Texas's Finest." He also served as T.M.E.A. band chairman in 1947.

Alto left the band directing field in 1948 and began a retail band instrument business in Longview. His partner in this endeavor was Clint Hackney, who had recently founded H & H Music Company in Houston. He and Clint were partners until Roy Swicegood came to work for Alto in 1949. Alto and Roy established Swicegood Music Company in Beaumont and later expanded the business to include Lake Charles, Louisiana. Alto sold his interest in Beaumont to Roy in the early fifties, but continued to help others get started in the retail band instrument business. He established stores in Paris with Johnny Williams, in Dallas with Carroll Colvert, and with Johnny Williams in Shreveport, Louisiana. He has also been a partner with Orville Kelly in Louisiana and is at this time a partner with Neil Grant in the Longview and Tyler branches of Tatum Music Company.

Alto is well-known in the music industry and, among band directors, as a person who has worked hard to promote the band program. He is recognized in East Texas as one of the most outstanding band conductors and clinicians as well as a music dealer, teacher, counselor, and friend.

Alto and his wife, Margaret, reside in Longview. He is still active in his music business where he continues to work a full day every day. He is always available to talk band, history, and politics with those who drop by. This is a rewarding experience for anyone if the occasion should arise. He has a wealth of knowledge and experiences to share with anyone who has the time. He was accepted into Phi Beta Mu in 1947 and was sponsored by Dean Shank.



# KING

W. E. Tregoe  
King-Benge-Armstrong  
210 Pleasant St.  
St. Walton Beach, FL 32548

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*King Brasswinds • Armstrong Woodwinds • Benge Professional Brass*  
\*\*\*\*\*

November 21, 1990

Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame Committee  
P. O. Box 722  
Whitehouse, Texas 75791

Dear Brothers:

I would like to recommend Mr. Alto Tatum, without reservation, for membership in the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame.

My knowledge of Mr. Tatum's outstanding contributions in the school band movement extends back to the late 1940's when I first learned of his excellence in developing school band programs.

Mr. Tatum was among a select few Texas Band Directors that "set the pace" for the rest of us.

Since 1965 I have been associated with him as a manufacturer's rep and a closer relationship since 1976 when it became my assignment to serve as Mr. Tatum's Conn representative for several years before going with King Musical Instruments on his recommendation.

As his representative I found him most helpful in business situations that were very difficult and learned further of his high moral character, unquestionable business ethics, uncompromising integrity and his dedication to the advancement of the school bands in his area.

There is no doubt that Mr. Tatum has had a profound influence on me in performing my daily activities.

I can think of no one more deserving of this honor than my dear friend, Mr. Alto Tatum.

Fraternally yours,

Bill Tregoe  
Past President Alpha Chapter 1964  
Current Member of Omega Chapter



\*\*\*\*\*  
*King Brasswinds • Armstrong Woodwinds • Benge Professional Brass • Klier Stringed Instruments*  
\*\*\*\*\*

August 27, 1990

PHI BETA MU  
Hall of Fame Committee  
P.O. Box 722  
White House, TX 75791


TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

It has been my privilege to know and work with Alto Tatum for the past thirteen years. As a former district manager in Texas, I found Mr. Tatum to be a man of great integrity and completely dedicated to bands and education in East Texas. Mr. Tatum's reputation as an outstanding band director is well known throughout the state of Texas and his reputation as a successful businessman is known throughout the music industry. As national sales manager, I have seen first hand the respect Mr. Tatum is given by the music industry.

As a former Oklahoma band director and member of Phi Beta Mu, I can appreciate Mr. Tatum's contribution to the young people of Texas for over 50 years.

Mr. Tatum's accomplishments are of the kind that help make men legends, and should be recognized.

Best regards,

  
John Morgan  
National Sales Manager

JM/ca  
K147/90

Jerry Gober  
8159 Tina Drive  
Tyler, Texas 75703

Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame Committee  
Barbara Lovett, Chairperson

Dear Committee:

I am writing in reference to Mr. Alto Tatum and his nomination to the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame.

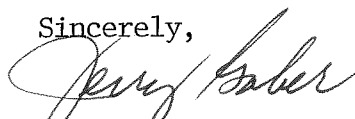
When I was a student at Pittsburg High School (1962-1966), Mr. Tatum served annually as clinician for our band in marching and concert performance. The event (as it truly was one) of his visit was on the level of contest performance. Mr. Tatum was revered as "the Mr. Tatum" (as he was Tatum Music Company) and what it was about, not just selling band instruments but promoting quality band programs in East Texas. As students, we clung to every word he spoke. Mr. Tatum truly cared about us as young musicians and earnestly held the success of our band and our director with the utmost regard.

His trademark dark suit, cough drop and battered eye glasses were legendary to band members. Those of us in leadership positions guided lower classmen to respect what Mr. Tatum stood for; somewhat of a Moses, guiding us truthfully, and representing and expecting the best in band music.

Though twenty-four years have passed and I am now enjoying my seventeenth year as a band director, I clearly recall how my band experience was enriched by his guidance. Seeing his director's uniform in the East Texas Oil Museum, Kilgore, Texas, in 1978 reminded me of the impact Mr. Tatum had on the early school band movement in East Texas. I am also thankful to have had private conversations with Mr. Tatum where I did all the listening, absorbing his expertise of music and vast knowledge historically of the school band. On these occasions I was always humbled and overwhelmed by his interest in me as a person and teacher.

As a student, teacher and gratefully as a fellow member of Phi Beta Mu, I am thankful to know Mr. Tatum and remain awed by his genius.

Sincerely,



Jerry M. Gober

ALTO TATUM

# TATUM MUSIC COMPANY

NEIL GRANT

301 North High  
Longview, Texas 75601  
(214) 758-3261

325 East Front  
Tyler, Texas 75702  
(214) 595-4341

January 23, 1991

To: Phi Beta Mu Hall or Fame Committee

Alto Tatum has been an outstanding influence in the world of bands.

He was an outstanding educator for a long number of years. Then, in the business world of providing musical needs of all kinds to schools and directors, his contributions expanded. For over 40 years he has aided directors, students and schools in every way possible.

His values and his constant striving for excellence in all of his endeavors has been an inspiration and a guiding example for many hundreds of directors and students, alike, to follow.

It is with sincerity and pleasure that I recommend him to the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Neil Grant". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Neil Grant

HALL OF Fame Committee  
Phi Beta Mu Board of Directors  
Membership of Phi Beta Mu

It is my sincere pleasure to write this letter on behalf of the nomination of Mr. Alto Tatum to the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame.

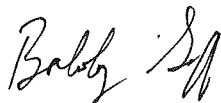
For the past 45 years it has been my good fortune to know and be a friend of Mr. Tatum. These years cover junior high, high school, college, and 37 years of teaching band in East Texas. Mr. Tatum has demonstrated many qualities and talents that make him an exceptional person. He brings to the band hall the same desire to do his best as he does in business and living an example before his fellow man. He excels in some areas, but he is good in almost all areas. He exhibited superior qualities of leadership while serving as a high school band director, educator, and now as a businessman.

Mr. Tatum also relates exceptionally well with each person that he meets. He is frank, outgoing and exhibits a pleasant and friendly personality. His appearance and morals are above reproach. Mr. Tatum's personal characteristics such as patience, consideration, emotional stability and good judgment are great assets to the schools and the band program.

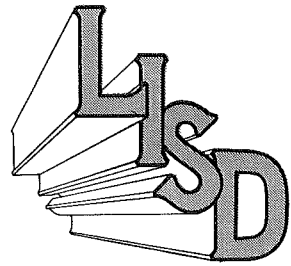
I can personally say that Mr. Tatum has been a great influence in my life. He has helped so much in my teaching career as well as personal matters. There has not been a greater influence on lives of Band Directors and Band Students in the East Texas area. The greatest example of dependability, dedication to life and respect of his fellow man has been lived by Mr. Tatum.

It is without reservation that I recommend Mr. Alto Tatum for Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame.

Sincerely,



Bobby Goff



SERVING YOUTH

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TO: Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame Committee

I am writing to recommend Alto Tatum to the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame. I feel Mr. Tatum is very deserving of this honor for his many contributions to bands, band students and band directors he has made in over fifty years.

Mr. Tatum's bands during his public school teaching were nationally renowned. He followed his brilliant directing career with many years in the music industry servicing band students and directors.

Looking back on the twenty-seven years that I have taught band, Mr. Tatum stands out as the strongest influence on my teaching, as well as in my attitude toward music and music education. Mr. Tatum was not only very helpful to me with advice and working with my bands, but as a music dealer always went the extra mile to help students get or keep instruments they would not normally have been able to afford, enabling them to be in the band.

Mr. Tatum has never been too busy to help any director or student. His sincere love of bands and young people has obviously been the driving force in his over half a century of supporting bands, directors and students.

I recommend Mr. Alto Tatum without reservation as a member of the Hall of Fame.

Fraternally Yours,

Hubert Almany  
Band Director  
Lindale High School

To: Phi Beta Mu Hall Of Fame Committee

From: Jim Yancey  
407 Sheffield  
Longview, TX 75601

Subject: Nomination Of ALTO TATUM To The Phi Beta Mu Hall Of Fame.

Alto Tatum belongs to that small group of heroes who during the 30's and 40's helped lay the foundation that has made Texas Bands the envy of our nation. His Gladewater High School Band during the 40's was of national renown and of the stuff which made legends.

May 31, 1990, at age 60 I retired from 34 years as a Texas Band Director. It has been my privilege and pleasure to know of Alto Tatum since 1951 and to know him personally since 1956. His positive influence on my life both professionally and personally has been immeasurable. He has been my teacher, counselor, and friend.

I cannot count the times or the amounts of time Mr. Tatum gave watching and listening to me rehearse my band, discussing precision, balance, blend, intonation, articulation, phrasing, all aspects of musicianship, literature, discipline, how to motivate young men and women to want to excel, how to deal and cooperate with school administrations, teachers, parents, and the community. There are fond memories of sitting on the front steps of my band hall, the hood of a car, on a street curb, in my kitchen, and countless other odd places until the wee late hours of morning exploring each part of the challenge and business of instrumental music education...all so I could improve my skills in lifting up my small corner of Texas Bands. Whatever I can do with and for kids and whatever degree of success I have had...is today in large part the result of my long association with Alto Tatum.

My story is only one of dozens. His unselfish interest in helping public school band directors and the advancement of Texas Bands has been obvious and prevailing. Down through the years I have witnessed the same concern and help given me repeated with others many, many times.

Mr. Tatum's business philosophy is the same as when he was directing band. A child is the most valuable asset our nation possesses. What is best for that child is the bottom line. Therefore, All our efforts as Music Educators must be directed to giving that child...THE best.

His business efforts have in my opinion created one of the finest and most complete service oriented music stores for public school bands in the nation. If you need equipment Tatum Music Company will probably have it and should by chance they do not...it will be had for you within a short time. Only quality instruments are carried. A young director with much to learn about band equipment can do business and know that whatever he buys for his students, his school, or himself it will be quality and that quality will be guaranteed.



When an instrument is taken in for repair you know that the work will be accomplished quickly and when returned it will be right.

Through out his life Mr. Tatum has strongly supported all of the professional organizations important to Texas Bands. Bands in the East Texas area have consistantly benefited from clinics and workshops provided through his personal efforts.

Time and again I have seen Mr. Tatum or a representative of his drive miles to bring only one or two small pieces of equipment, or supplies, or repair to a director or student preparing for an important rehearsal, performance, or competition. There was no way the trip could be profitable. Mr. Tatum simply wanted to provide service and see the student or band do well.

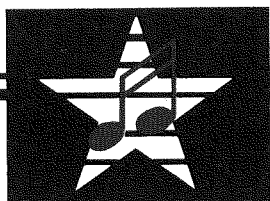
Alto Tatum never forced himself on anyone but has been and is always there for those who needed and wanted help. His intelligence, vast store of common sense, analytical grasp of any situation, straight forwardness, compassion and integrity are legend to those of us who know him. His word is his law. He takes us back to that bygone time when a man's handshake was his bond.

Shortly Alto Tatum will be 79 years of age. He has devoted a lifetime to giving Texas children and Texas Bands the best he has had to offer. At this point in time I know of no one more deserving to receive this high honor bestowed by our Brotherhood.

Fraternally yours,



Jim Yancey



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NACOGDOCHES HIGH SCHOOL  
4310 APPLEBY SAND ROAD  
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS 75961-1999

Barbara Lovett, Chairman  
Hall of Fame Committee  
Phi Beta Mu  
Alpha Chapter

January 20, 1991

Dear Barbara,

With a deep sense of gratitude and respect, I nominate Mr. Alto Tatum of Longview, Texas, for selection to the Phi Beta Mu, Alpha Chapter Hall of Fame. I regret that my lack of eloquence will keep me from adequately conveying the influence that Mr. Tatum has had on our East Texas band programs, on the many band directors who have taught in the area, and on the educational music business.

When I first entered band directing as a very green and young part-time teacher during my senior year at Stephen F. Austin State University, I quickly realized how dependent that small class B high school band was on the support of Tatum Music Company. Mr. Tatum took a keen interest in the band and in helping me with that critical first job. He had a way of making my work seem special, and he always had time to help me with problems that I encountered. Many times he has advised me with music selections, rehearsed my bands, and helped in dealing with the political realities of trying to build and sell a music program to sometimes reluctant schools and communities. As I gained experience, I noticed that many directors got that same special "Tatum Attention" and that Mr. Tatum was just as crucial to their careers as he was to mine. Being first a teacher himself, Mr. Tatum has always been able to relate to the everyday trials and tribulations of teaching.

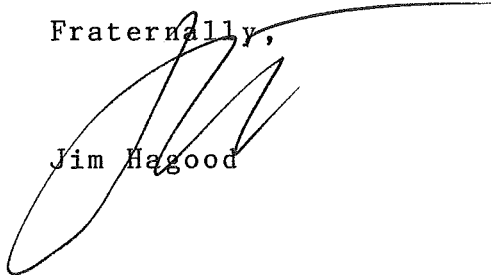
The Gladewater Band, under the direction of Alto Tatum was one of those legendary groups in East Texas band lore. Although I never had the privilege of hearing or watching that group, I have many times heard the stories and read of the exploits of that famous band. Along with such bands as Palestine and the White Oak High School Band, directed by his friend Roy Swicegood, the Gladewater

Band started the East Texas tradition of excellence. Those bands were from "oil field" schools, but the notion of schools' providing a topnotch band program quickly grew into the rural poor schools which are far more numerous in our part of the State. Over the years, I have noticed that Mr. Tatum has a strong concern for these schools with limited resources that strive to excel. Mr. Tatum has taught us the importance of helping each other build our bands with that intense, yet friendly, competition that is unique to East Texas. His background as a successful director has given him an understanding of how hard it is to build an outstanding band program and how important a strong local music store is to sustain quality music education.

Over forty years ago, Mr. Tatum gave up school teaching in order to open a music store in Longview. Until that time, schools had to go to a large urban area to get supplies and service for their bands. Mr. Tatum's gamble has worked far better than he probably envisioned. Over the years, a unique relationship has developed between Tatum Music Company and the band directors and administrators of the schools of East Texas. It is a relationship built on trust, integrity, and mutual respect. Mr. Tatum has, above all, remained committed to the importance of quality music education and has the respect of other retailers and major manufacturers far beyond the boundaries of East Texas. While Mr. Tatum may have given up working for a school, he has never given up being a teacher with a special love for kids and a special commitment to bands in our public schools.

I am sure that there is a consensus among the band directors in our part of the State that if only one East Texas member of the Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Mu could be included in the Hall of Fame, that that person should be Mr. Alto Tatum. What he means to our area cannot be put into words. He is our mentor, our trusted colleague, and most of all, our dear friend. His health in recent years has not allowed him to be as active in fraternity activities as he once was, but his interest in bands and love of music education burns as bright as ever. It is time, NOW, to recognize his many contributions to our profession. With deep pride, I hardily nominate our fellow Phi Beta Mu brother Mr. Alto Tatum to be included in the Alpha Chapter Hall of Fame.

Fraternally,



Jim Hagood

P. O. Box 722  
Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
January 23, 1991

Hall of Fame Committee  
Phi Beta Mu

Dear Committee,

I am pleased to nominate Alto Tatum for membership in the Phi Beta Mu Hall of Fame. He is an outstanding band conductor and, in my opinion, certainly deserving of this honor.

Not only was Alto the director of many superior bands, he was and is an outstanding teacher with the talent to convey his musical knowledge to others. When he left the band directing field and became a music retailer, he did not become just a horn salesman. He has probably held as many band clinic rehearsals as anyone alive today. To observe one of his rehearsals is a rewarding experience as he can accomplish more productivity and improvement in a band than anyone that I have ever known. I have never seen him when he was not in complete control of any situation. He has always been able to get his point across to the students and directors in a positive and understandable way. He is truly a genius in conducting, listening, and dealing with people. I remember when I was in the Clarksville High School band in the early fifties when Alto came to rehearse our band for contest. I can still remember how well we responded to him. It was an exciting rehearsal. My band director, whom I greatly admired, had the utmost respect for Alto Tatum. We heard over and over how good the "Alto Tatum-directed Glade-water Band" was. Mr. Hayes, my band director, would not dare take us to contest without Alto having heard us first. When I became a band director, I felt the same way as Mr. Hayes about Alto. There is no way I can put into words all the help I have received or the vast knowledge I have learned from him. He has always given me confidence in myself. After my band rehearsal, he would say that the practice went well because the students were prepared. He would not accept excuses and if my toes needed stepping on, he would do so. He was not the type of person who would pat you on the back and say they sounded good if they did not. I will never forget one time when he came for a rehearsal and I said that the band played better yesterday. He quickly responded, "No they didn't, you just listened better today." He also told me one time that you didn't come into this world knowing anything, but had to learn it from someone else. Many directors and I have certainly learned alot from Alto Tatum. He has been unselfish in sharing his knowledge, expertise, and experiences. I asked him once who he had learned the most from about band directing. He replied without hesitation, "Dean Shank, Lyle Skinner, and Everette McCracken."

As busy as he is, Alto always has time for others. If you have time for a cup of coffee, he will take the time, whatever it takes, but he will not stop there. He will work as late as it takes to get a job done. He never seems to tire and works extra to make up for time lost, but has always made himself available to any director, friend, or customer. He is a true friend to all who know him. He is a highly moral church-going man who is well respected in his community.

Alto has also had a strong influence on our band programs through his association with people in the music industry. I have seen him with an armload of horns getting on a plane to Elkhart just to show the manufacturers firsthand what they did wrong. The people who make band instruments respect and listen to him because they know him and what he stands for. They know that he knows the workings of the instruments and has a keen knowledge of the industry and market place. When dealing with the manufacturers, he always has the bands, directors, and the students who play the instruments in mind. I have heard him say that a band instrument is not a consumer product because it isn't worth much without a teacher. He also says he has never asked anyone to purchase an instrument. He states that he does not have to because it's the band directors and good teaching that sell the horns.

If you were to ask Alto today what he is, he would reply, "I'm a band director."

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination.

Respectfully,



Stanley Walker