

# Michael A. “Mike” “Pops” Marotta, Sr.

1921-2019

ENTERTAINER, MUSICIAN, STONEMASON, BUSINESSMAN, FUNDRAISER, CIVIC LEADER

WRITTEN BY JUDI MAROTTA

Mike Marotta, a proud Italian American born and raised in Monterey was an entertainer, musician, businessman, fund-raiser and civic leader.

He was the grandson of Joseph Marotta and Coradina Mauceri originally from Syracuse, Sicily. Joseph and Coradina had seven children--Vince, Arthur, Mario, Mary, Tom, Nick and Emma. Of these children, four were musicians and four were stonemasons. Arthur Marotta, Mike’s father, moved with his family to Tunis, Tunisia, in Northern Africa just south of Sicily, where they found work as stonemasons. They learned Arabic as their second language. From there they emigrated to France where they learned to speak French. Since it was much easier to come to America through Canada, they left France for Montreal. Arthur met his future wife, Della Houde, in Montreal where they married. Their dream of coming to America was realized when they emigrated from Montreal to Monterey, California.



The Marotta clan lived in New Monterey on Belden Street for many years. They could be found at most baptisms, engagements, weddings, and birthday parties usually providing the musical entertainment.

**Musical Marottas 1960,  
*Game & Gossip Magazine.***

Mike was born into a musical family, and he started performing at age five at the State Theatre on Alvarado Street. He played the accordion and drums and was a great tap-dancer. In 1932 he became the youngest member of the Musicians' Union, the American Federation of Musicians, at age 11. He frequently played at the Del Monte Hotel (which is now the Naval Postgraduate School). By age 14 he was a radio show musician, and by the time he was 16 he was playing in nightclubs. During his high school years, he could be found playing at La Ida Café, Kalisa Moore's bar on Cannery Row where John Steinbeck and Doc Ricketts were regulars. His musical journey then led him to Hollywood where he played his accordion with such stars as Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, The Riders of the Purple Sage and the Sons of the Pioneers. After his stint in Hollywood, he returned to Monterey to work with his father, Arthur Marotta, as a stonemason/bricklayer during the day and musician at night. Two full-time jobs were the norm for him.



During World War II Mike, like many musicians of his day, entertained the troops. He formed a show band, "The Funatics" that entertained troops at various military camps and hospitals throughout the country. They raised money for war bonds, toured with the USO and did their part to raise morale. He remembered that time as being emotionally draining while also being satisfying in that thousands of troops, lonely and far from home, received comfort and entertainment.

With music as his spark, Mike Marotta Sr. has been a force for good in the Monterey area as a businessman, musician and community leader. He developed and owned several commercial properties in the city of Monterey. Mike's love for the Monterey Peninsula, where he was born and raised, is reflected in the innumerable hours and



endless energy dedicated to community service and fundraising work for the Community Hospital, United Way, American Heart Association, Salvation Army, Festa Italia, Dixieland Monterey, Children's Home Society, Downtown Monterey Business Association and numerous other charities. The Monterey Chamber of Commerce named him "1982 Citizen of the Year." He served

on the Monterey Planning Commission for 10 years, and served as a director for the world-famous Monterey Jazz Festival. In 1999 he was honored to be named a "Fellow" for Cal State University Monterey Bay for his contributions in art and music, an award bestowed upon individuals who have made multiple civic contributions and excelled in their professions. His community service was in tune with a simple philosophy he often expressed. "Life should be lived like a good musical score; you need a good beginning, a good middle, and a good end. Most important are the beginning and the end. You can make a lot of mistakes in the middle and still pull it off. That's music and that's life." From beginning to end, he composed his life brilliantly.



**La Merienda, 2013. L-R: Mayor Dan Albert, Sr. (Monterey's longest serving mayor) Ree Brunell, singing "It happened in Monterey." Musicians: Dave Dally (violin), Mike Marotta Jr., Mike Marotta Sr. and Dennis Murphy (bass).**

He was proud to be the musical director of Monterey's Annual Italian Festival, formerly known as the Santa Rosalia Festival and now called the "Festa Italia" "for over 60 years. His was often the featured band performing alongside the much beloved and musically talented Johnny Catalano. He was also the featured entertainer for the City of Monterey's annual "La Merienda"

birthday party for many decades playing with a full band including Mike Marotta Jr. on accordion.

In 1988 he was honored to play for Bob and Dolores Hope at a party in Pebble Beach they hosted in honor of local philanthropist Virginia Stanton. He was also thrilled to play for the arrival of Bobby Kennedy at the Monterey airport, and when Luciano Pavarotti performed a concert in Pebble Beach with a full orchestra, Mike was found to be sitting with those musicians for the “gig” of a lifetime.



After the war in 1948 Mike met and married his wife, Phyllis Colella, and they began their family consisting of two girls and two boys who are also very musically talented. That talent has been passed down through three of his children--Mike Marotta Jr., Dave Marotta and Janice Marotta-Perl, all professional musicians. His daughter Judi Marotta continues to work in the family real estate and property management business. His

granddaughters Rachel Marotta-Halim, Miranda Marotta-Perl and great-granddaughter Anna Bella Halim are also outstanding singers who have performed at many local community events, venues and fundraisers.

### **Marotta Family 1996**

**Front row L-R: Phyllis Marotta, Mike Marotta, and Lucille Marotta (Mike's mother).**

**Back row L-R: Dave Marotta, Anita Marotta, Judi Marotta, Phil Valdman, Janice Marotta-Perl, Jacob Perl, Laurel Marotta and Mike Marotta Jr.**





**L-R: Mike Sr., Mike Jr., and  
Dave Marotta, with Dennis.**



**Christmas, Mike and Mike Jr.**

Mike was honored on January 31, 2009, by the Monterey County Business Council as a Monterey County Music Luminary in appreciation for his outstanding contribution to the economic vitality, growth and preservation of Monterey County.

In 2020 The Mike Marotta Tribute Sculpture Committee was established by Chris Shake and David Armanasco to raise funds for a bronze statue to memorialize Mike. The art piece of Mike sitting on a bench playing his beloved accordion was created by world-renowned sculptor Steven Whyte and was gifted to the City of Monterey. The statue was placed in the heart of downtown Monterey at the corner of Alvarado and Franklin Streets, where visitors are able to sit or stand next to it for photo opportunities. For many years Mike Marotta was known as the “Mayor of Alvarado Street” where he lived, worked and promoted the downtown to anyone who had an interest in the community he so dearly loved.

Not only was Mike a talented musician and devoted community leader, but he was also an all-around fun fellow to be with. Entertaining people is what he enjoyed most. This local citizen reached a place of comfort through his successes as a businessman, yet his greatest joy came from playing his accordion and entertaining folks. Mike Marotta was a much-loved man who brought his own brand of business, inspiration, music, personality and history to those who met him.



**Mike Marotta Jr.**

**Mike Marotta Sr.**

**Dave Marotta**

Mike died on November 17, 2019, and is fondly remembered and dearly missed by four children, seven grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. His wife, Phyllis, passed away in 1998. Two of his children, Mike Marotta Jr. and Judi Marotta, currently remain very active in the Monterey business community and continue to support local charities and fund-raisers for the Monterey Peninsula. Family, great friends, music and his town were his greatest joys and passions, and the values that were so dear to him live on through the next generations of Marottas.

**ITALIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY HONOREE 2007**