



Vintage Band members Phil Marston, Billy Aldrich, Mark Bower and Mark Wilson have each all worked as professional musicians at one point in their lives. Now, they play rock hits from the 60s, 70s and 80s together at venues and events in Lake City.

# KEEPING IT

# Lake City's own *Vintage Band* jams out to rock classics.

Story and photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY

**A**lthough their songs are vintage, the way they play them is anything but. With a youthful energy and undeniable chemistry, Lake City's own Vintage Band preforms some of the biggest rock hits from the past with an unprecedented amount of talent.

The Vintage Band isn't your typical music group. The band members, including lead guitarist Billy Aldrich, bass player Mark Bower, guitarist Mark Wilson and drummer Phil Marston, have all worked as professional musicians at one point in their lives.

You could even say that they themselves are vintage, in the best way possible.

"It's something that hopefully gets better with age," Wilson said. "God knows we're aged."

Now, in their 60s and 70s, this group of talented musicians came together to form one of Lake City's most sought-after music groups.

"You got four old guys playing old classic rock and roll," Aldrich said. "That's vintage stuff."

They don't play in the hopes of getting famous or landing a record deal; they play because they love the music.

"We play the music we love and we love the music we play," Wilson said. "We've all been doing this too long not to."

Their love for the music they play is so clear when they're performing that you can't help but smile and sing along. Their passion flows from their hearts, into their fingers and out through their instruments, filling the

room with energy.

While watching the Vintage Band sing a four-part harmony, or seeing lead guitarist Aldrich shred the guitar, or even just while observing the group set up their equipment, you can feel the passion they have for what they do and the desire they have to put on a stellar performance.

## For the love of music

All four members of the Vintage Band have made livings as musicians at one point in their lives. Now, Aldrich, a retired commercial pilot, Bower, who owns his own business, and Wilson and Marston, both retired teachers, perform together because music is simply something they love.

"For me, without having to define the term technically, it's therapy," Wilson said. "When we play music it's like therapy."

"It's spiritual almost," Bower added. "It's a part of your soul, it's a part of your being. Music comes from within you, and if it doesn't flow through you, it's not good. You're like the vessel for the music."

The members of the Vintage Band have all had their time in the spotlight, and they know just how much work it takes to get there.

"Only in this business do you load \$5,000 worth of equipment into a \$1,000 van to drive 50 miles to play four hours for a hundred bucks," Aldrich said. "Only in this business would you do something silly like that."

"The 20-year olds that are doing it, they don't need Motrin at the end of the night," Wilson added with a laugh.

For them, they play because they love the music, not because they want to see their name in lights.

"It's about the love of playing and just having fun," Marston said.

## Meet the Band

Although they now perform mostly rock hits from the 60s, 70s and 80s, the members of the Vintage Band all got their start playing different genres of music.

"Even though we're around the same age, if you asked us what were your musical influences that made you want

# VINTAGE



**PHIL MARSTON | DRUMS**



**BILLY ALDRICH | GUITAR**



**MARK BOWER | BASS**



**MARK WILSON | GUITAR**

to play music back in the early days, we would all pretty much have a different avenue,” Wilson said. “Mark was more of the edgier, hardcore rock, Phil’s the jazz and R&B guy of the group and Billy’s been playing longer than the rest of us.”

“Rock and roll and show band stuff for me,” Billy added. “And Mark [Wilson] started off with a lot of bluegrass.”

Wilson, 66, started playing guitar in junior high school and played gigs with high school garage bands. After moving to Lake City in 1975, he met up with a couple of fellow well-known Lake City musicians: Skip Johns and Donald Johns. He played bluegrass music with Johns for more than 30 years and even got to play at the Grand Ole Opry.

“Thirty years of bluegrass definitely helped develop an ear for harmonies and timing because there are no drums,” Wilson said.

Bower, 62, developed a deep love for music at age 13, when he went to a teen nightclub and heard the band play *Mony Mony*. He’s been playing nightclubs since the early 70s, and says that he’s only had maybe a four or five year hiatus in his whole life where he didn’t play.

When he’s not jamming on bass with the Vintage Band, Bower is working on vintage cars at his business, Bower’s Vettes & Classics.

“I work an eight-hour day then go play with these guys every night whenever we can, and I enjoy the hell out of it. Every minute,” Bower said.

Marston, 69, started singing when he was seven years old. The drummer, singer and songwriter made a living as a professional musician from 1962 to 1991. During that time, he played for a number of different bands all over the country, including Pywackett, a Boston-based band which performed original music and opened for such notables as Blood Sweat & Tears and The Turtles. Marston still writes songs and also plays in the Orchard Community Church praise and worship band.

“I did make it to the big stage on a number of occasions,” Marston said. “I’ve played for as many as 80,000 and as few as three people.”

Aldrich, 76, started singing with his mother, who was a singer with The Collegians, when he was just four years old. The Vintage Band’s lead guitar player played with his band, the Countdowns, for a Miami radio station and also did work with James Brown and the Famous Flames. In 1976 he joined The Van-Dells, an oldies show group specializing in 50’s and 60’s rock and roll. He was able to have dual careers as a musician and commercial pilot before moving to Lake City in 2004. Aldrich still performs with The Van-Dells once or twice a year, and out of all the acts he’s performed with, his favorite is the Vintage Band.

“This is the best stuff,” Aldrich said. “With these three guys, it’s the best stuff that I’ve ever been involved in.”

### **Becoming the Vintage Band**

The Vintage Band started up almost two years ago, but some of the members had been playing together before then.

Aldrich and Marston got started together playing praise and worship at Orchard Community Church about 10 years ago. Then, three years ago Aldrich saw Wilson and Rick Bringger, another local musician, playing at the Elks Club.

“With a little arm twisting they invited me up to play,” Aldrich said.

Aldrich joined Wilson and Bringger, then after a year Bringger left the group to focus on work. At the same time Marston and Bower were in a group called Kick Start, and that group was going through a personal change as well. By then,



The Vintage Band, consisting of guitarist Mark Wilson (from left), drummer Phil Marston, guitarist Billy Aldrich and bass player Mark Bower perform at the Lake City VFW.

Marston had been jumping in and out with Wilson and Aldrich, and almost two years ago Aldrich, Bower, Marston and Wilson joined up to become the Vintage Band.

In addition to all the band members being seasoned, talented performers, they are also close friends, which explains their chemistry on stage.

“We don’t fight,” Bower said. “This is one of the first bands I’ve been in where we don’t have confrontations. We’re all friends as well as bandmates.”

“For us that’s the most important thing is our friendships,” Aldrich added. “We’re going through this together.”

You can clearly see how much fun the Vintage Band has together while they’re performing. Even while setting up their equipment, they laugh, crack jokes, and tease each other. Based on how comfortable they are together, you would think that they have been playing together for years.

“We’re all buddies,” Bower said. “We enjoy being together and we enjoy playing together so that makes it that much easier.”

## Rock and Roll

The Vintage Band is known for playing classic rock covers from the 60s, 70s and 80s, including hits by the Beatles and the Eagles. They also play a few country songs, including hits by Jimmy Buffett, but country isn’t their genre of choice.

“That’s just not our style,” Aldrich said. “We don’t wear our baseball hats backwards and we smile a lot. We’re a friendly bunch of guys. Our music is different as well. We’re not into the southern thing.”

When making their set list, the Vintage Band focuses on playing songs that they’re good at and songs that you won’t hear other bands around here playing.

“One of the things we do is we try and pick songs that nobody else is doing,” Marston said. “Either nobody else is doing or is able to do.”

“Some of our songs are what everybody plays,” Wilson added. “You know, the ‘Brown Eyed Girl’ type stuff. But we also do some challenging and sophisticated songs that are more challenging because we don’t have a keyboard or piano player to back us up.”

The band practices every Tuesday night at Aldrich’s airplane hanger at his home in Lake City. Among the collection of classic motorcycles, tools, couches and Aldrich’s airplane, the Vintage

Band comes together, instruments and song ideas in hand, to work on their continuously-growing setlist.

For Aldrich, his favorite song to perform is the 1965 soft rock ballad “Cara Mia,” made famous by Jay & The Americans. Although it’s not their standard rock and roll, Aldrich enjoys playing this song the most because of the four-part harmony. When you’re in a band where every member can sing, songs like this showcase everyone’s talents.

“It’s not rock and roll, it’s a beautiful song,” Aldrich said. “It’s hard to describe.”

When they come together, they all normally suggest one or two songs to try out. If they all agree that the song is something they should learn to play, they’ll give it a try and if it works, they’ll add it to their repertoire. Together, they focus on nailing down the songs and staying true to their original versions.

“The most important thing to do for us is to get it right,” Aldrich said. “For the people who love these songs they want to hear the songs how they remember them. We try and stay as close to that as we can.”

You will often see the Vintage Band out at local bars and restaurants in the Lake City area. Something the band really enjoys about doing what they do is the fact that they are able to help local businesses by putting on a good show.

“It’s about being able to entertain people and help people build a business,” Aldrich said. “If we go in and delay a restaurant or a club, we are genuinely interested in the welfare of that business. We want to help them do what they need to do. If we can bring a crowd in trying to do a first-class job for them, that’s the most important thing for us when we sign up to do something with a room.”

While they do recognize that there are talented musical acts in Lake City, the Vintage Band doesn’t share their goal of trying to make it in the professional music industry.

“There’s a lot of good bands in the area, but they’re all doing the same thing,” Wilson said. “They’re playing the top country songs and they’re good at it. Maybe they have long-term goals of making it and going to Nashville. Our long term is to just keep playing and getting better.”

The Vintage Band will be the featured entertainers at Haven Hospice’s annual Derby Day at the Oaks Equestrian Center on May 6. Until then, they plan on continuing to play when they can and put on one incredible show after another by living up to their “vintage” name.