

# R I D D U M S By WILLIE PAINTER



## Vinnie Remembered

Vincent Earl Brooks, Jr., 49, known to family and friends as Vince or Vinnie, passed away on October 30, 2004. At his side was the love of his life, his wife DeChanile. Born February 10, 1955, he is also survived by his mother, Jackie Brooks; sister, Jackie Faustino, husband Al, their children Audra and Alex; sister Beth Broome, husband Tab, and their daughter Brooks.

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*When we finished the tune you said, "Great. You're in the band." That simply, we locked into each other.*

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A loving husband, devoted son and friend to everyone who knew him, Vinnie put more life into his 49 years than most would in twice that time. He was an extraordinary musician, excelling on drums and vocals. He played with many bands, including the Boomers, Mike Hamer and the Rhinoceroses, the Tommy G. Experience, the Real Gone Cats, Lightnin' Wells and many others. Vinnie loved all types of music. He was also an accomplished recording engineer, operating his own facility, Moon Cricket Studios, for a number of years.

*Vinnie's spirit is a blessing to those of us fortunate enough to know him. His music and the love he shared will continue...*

— The Herald-Sun, November 2, 2004

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**O**K, Vinnie. As I write this it's been a couple of weeks since you left us. Soon it will have been a month, and then it'll be a new year, a year without you, my first without you since

1978. Remember back then, the late '70s? The Real Gone Cats were a three-piece band with some good original songs that Gary Bowen, the guitar player and singer, had written. He didn't

want to be the only guitarist, so I came out to your house in Rolesville to audition. I'd played music with Craig, the bass player, since high school but didn't really know you or Gary. We played a couple of songs and you asked me if I sang. I asked if you'd heard of a guy named Elvis Costello and we played "Miracle Man." When we finished the tune you said, "Great. You're in the band." That simply, we locked into each other.

And so began a relationship that lasted 26 years. After the Cats broke up, you called me in 1983 and said, "Let's start a band. We'll call it the Boomers." We were a four-piece band for different periods; Denis played guitar for a while, and the last few years we had Robert on keyboards. There were others, but the majority of the time it was just you, me, and Craig. We had a sound that people said seemed bigger than just a guitar, bass, and drums should have. We knew we could play whatever kind of music we had a passion for, and we enjoyed the fact that we couldn't be categorized.

Maybe it wasn't the smartest move career-wise, but we played only what we liked, what we really dug. There were just a couple of original songs in the Boomers' set list; our specialty was interpreting other people's music, making it our own. We loved the blues and the Grateful Dead and Steve Earle. We loved Rockpile and Marshall Crenshaw and the Clash. And we were the only band I knew of that would follow a Waylon Jennings song with a tune by the Time. We loved music that we responded to, that made us feel more in touch with ourselves. You became, out of necessity, a singer, and you were a damn good one.

You always were the best drummer I've ever played with; not many guys who beat the skins keep their heads up, make eye contact, listen for what direction the song might be going, and react accordingly. Only musicians do that, and we all know that

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***Vinnie and DeChanile Brooks***

drummers are defined as guys who like to hang around with musicians, right? Ah, drummer jokes! I think your favorite was: How do you know when the drummer on the stage is level? (When the drool runs out *both* sides of the drummer's mouth, of course.)

Remember when we played "Run, Run, Rudolph" with the

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*I was proud to play at your wedding. I was hoping you would play at mine, but that's not going to happen.*

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Apex High School marching band at the Christmas parade in that tiny community called Friendship? That would have been 1986. We were set up on a flat-bed truck and the school band was right there on Old Highway 1. It was about 10 in the morning, and as the song says, we'd done a lot of things the night before, but sleeping wasn't one of them. We still pulled it off, and it was a moment I'll always remember.

Sometimes we opened shows for people who were our heroes. The Blasters were cool; they hung out with us after their set, and Phil Alvin even remembered our names. We opened for the Fabulous Thunderbirds and you got to play Fran Christina's drum kit. One of your biggest inspirations,

Leon Russell, didn't say boo to us, but that was OK; that's just how Leon is. Other times we got to play music with folks we admired. Having Jorma Kaukonen sit in with us at Halby's in Durham was a big thrill for me, and there was the time we all went to Greensboro and sang backup on a song with Marcia Ball.

Our friendship and musical brotherhood endured through a marriage of mine and a couple of serious relationships of yours. Then in 1985 you met DeChanile and I met Robin and we each knew we had found our true love. I was proud to play at your wedding. I was hoping you would play at mine this Thanksgiving, but that's not going to happen.

I felt a lot of anger toward you when you got so sick, Vinnie. You knew that you were getting worse and you didn't help yourself or let anyone else help you. When you were reaching the end I was angry at you for making your wife a widow and for leaving your friends and family so soon. I was angry that you and I would never look across a stage at each other and connect musically in a way that few ever had. I was angry, selfishly I suppose, because you

were not going to be with me any more. We were supposed to grow old together, to be buddies, you know? It wasn't supposed to happen like this. You were one of the smartest, funniest, and most infuriating people I've ever known. And God knows you were hard-headed, but without all those traits you wouldn't have been you.

After Stevie Ray Vaughan died in 1990, his brother Jimmie said, "When you lose someone you love, everything changes. Even the sky changes color." My sky is pretty dark right now, Vinnie. As time goes by I'll get over the immediate hurt, but I'll miss you more and more. We were alike in many ways; we each had sisters growing up, but no brother, and both our mothers spoiled us. You were my best friend for a long time. You never doubted me, even when I

doubted myself. You gave me support when I wasn't sure I was good enough and wanted to quit playing. You gave me love in so many ways that I can't begin to mention them all. I hope you know how much I love you.

Those last few days in the hospital, your friends were helping DeChanile deal with the red tape as much as we could. I ended up speaking with your medical team at several crucial times. At one point a doctor said to me, "What relation are you to Mr. Brooks?" Without hesitation I said, "his brother." But that wasn't true. You were closer to me than any biological relative could have been.

Rest in peace, my brother. •

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*God knows you were hard-headed, but without all those traits you wouldn't have been you.*

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*Willie Painter lives and works in Durham. He enjoys playing and listening to music.*



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