

Freddy Martin, big band leader, at 76

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. (AP) — Big band leader Freddy Martin, whose "sweet society music" once set the pace at the nation's most popular ballrooms, died after suffering a stroke, a family friend said Saturday. He was 76.

Dinah Shore, Merv Griffin, Buddy Clark, Russ Morgan and Helen Ward were among the vocalists who recorded with Martin's band.

Martin had been playing dates until he suffered his first stroke on June 8. He died Friday night at Hoag Memorial Hospital from complications after a second seizure on Sept. 29, said Bryce Patterson.

Martin, who led his band on tenor sax, was dubbed "Mr. Silvertone" by Johnny Hodges, Duke Ellington's alto saxophonist.

One of his biggest instrumental hits was the 1941 recording of "Tonight We Love," derived from Tchaikovsky's Concerto for Piano in

B Flat.

Martin's bands recorded hundreds of songs for the Columbia, RCA Victor, Brunswick and Decca labels. He sometimes used pseudonyms.

"That was common in that time, because of the type of contracts artists signed," said Jim Seeley, who hosts a radio show on KPFF in Los Angeles featuring swing, big band and jazz music recorded before 1950.

Martin's band played at the most popular spots of the era: the Waldorf-Astoria and Roosevelt hotels in New York; the Edgewater Beach Hotel and Palmer House in Chicago and the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles.

It was at the Grove that he got the inspiration for "Tonight We Love," said his son, Fred.

In 1942, Miss Shore recorded "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" with the band. Griffin had a hit with the 1948 song "I've Got A Lovely Bunch Of Coconuts."