



## Performer Profile

### Marvin Hooper– Putting Meaning in the Music



His first instrument was a drum at age six. Then, when he was a few years older, he worked in his neighbor's yard until he'd saved enough money to buy a play trumpet. For Army veteran Marvin Hooper, 58, of Temple, Texas, music has always been part of life. Growing up, Hooper's family wasn't able to afford an instrument, so instead, he played whatever instrument the band instructor could lend him. After learning how to play various brass instruments, Hooper went on to be an integral member of his high school band and even won a state title for his stellar performance on the tuba.

He majored in music at the Prairie View A & M University, a member of the Texas A & M University System, and there he joined the ROTC program. Following graduation, Hooper fulfilled his duty to his country as a forward observer for the Army. About his military service, Hooper says, "If I had to do it again, I definitely would. It was a good experience and helps me even now." While serving, Hooper was a brass specialist for the cavalry division band, playing everything from a bugle to a trombone.

Following military service, Hooper worked as a band instructor and led his band to win various championship titles. Then, in the early 1990s, he fell ill and sought care at the Temple, Texas VA Medical Center where he met music therapist and a Festival show director, Jennifer Lewis. "Jenny got me involved with the VA choir," he said. "I was shy at first because I hadn't really been a singer, but then I got the opportunity to play the trombone and I enjoyed that greatly." Lewis was successful in her attempts to persuade Hooper to enter the National Veterans Creative Arts competition. In 1996, Hooper was invited to Kentucky to perform his winning entry.

He lost touch with the VA choir in the years that followed, but later, when depression and post-traumatic stress disorder began to feel their effects, he once again turned to VA for medical care. In 2001, he rejoined the music therapy program at the local medical center and has been part of its creative arts program ever since. His talents have also earned him a number of return visits to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, held in different locations each year.

In this year's stage show, Hooper will perform a Nat King Cole classic entitled, "*Nature Boy*." Hooper says, "I chose this song because it has so much meaning. It's about love and it really spoke to me. I suppose it taught me to love myself more." Hooper has a history of picking songs that are near and dear to his heart. In 2004, he chose another Nat King Cole song, "*Straighten up and Fly Right*" to perform. "In the past, I've had low self-esteem and music seems to be a catalyst for self-expression," he explains. "During the time I was singing '*Straighten up and Fly Right*,' I just needed to get myself together and singing those lyrics certainly helped."

The national competition gave Marvin Hooper the drive he had been missing for years, and he takes pride in the recognition he's won for his talents this year. He realizes the importance of giving back and takes part in what he calls, "peer support" by instructing others at the medical center in their musical endeavors. "This program helps me slowly build all the pieces back together – I honestly don't know where I'd be without it."