

Benö Guttman



In 1936, Benny Goodman was crowned King of Swing. Ten years earlier, in 1931, when he still answered to his birth name of Benö Guttman, he was known as the Prince of Parades because he used to lead processions of people through the streets of San Andreas, California, his hometown. No matter the paraders immensely enjoyed his playing, Benö was often cited by the town council for disturbing the peace. Like Pedro (“Pied”) Piper of Hamelin (Ariz.), he attracted rats by the hundreds with his playing, so members of the town butcher and baker guild demanded that he be declared a health hazard, too. The request was opposed by the United Brotherhood of Candlestickmakers because townspeople were buying candle holders by the bucketful to ward off the frisky rodents. As the debate escalated, so did Benö’s parading activities. His human followers got to be so numerous that those in the rear couldn’t hear the beat tones of his clarinet. So he added an over-the-shoulder foot-activated percussion module to underscore the rhythm. This kept everyone marching in sync. On the downside, the thud of the bass drum combined with the simultaneous pounding of more than a hundred and fifty-five size-10 feet radically altered the tectonic equilibrium of the transform fault on which the town had been unwittingly built. Just as the San Andreas town council announced Guttman’s fate (guilty on all counts!), an extra puissant bass drum thwack set off a massive temblor that caused all of western California to break off and fall into the Pacific Ocean. In comparison, a couple dozen extra rats in town was *nothing!*