

## Foy Willing

Foy Willing was born Foy Lopez Willingham in Bosque County, Texas in 1914. He started singing at an early age, and performed solos on radio as a teenager. He moved to New York City and performed with the Crazy Water Crystals Gang for two years beginning in 1933, then returned to Texas. Around the early part of 1943 he moved to California, becoming the leader of the Riders of the Purple Sage.

The Riders of the Purple Sage was one of the most popular singing groups during the "Singing Cowboys" craze of the 1930s-50s era. These groups largely catered to a romanticized version of the American cowboy popularized by numerous Hollywood films. Foy Willing and his Riders performed on numerous radio programs and appeared in several Westerns. They had several major hits, including "Cool Water" and "Ghost Riders in the Sky"

Foy and the Riders of the Purple Sage still have a great impact on popular music today. They inspired the band New Riders of the Purple Sage, which became a regular opening act for the Grateful Dead and inspired many country-rock bands of the 1970's, including the Eagles.

The original Riders of the Purple Sage disbanded in 1952, although they would occasionally regroup to perform. Foy became the manager of KSBW radio in Salinas, California in the late 1950's, and moved to Hollywood in 1961. He continued to write and record songs and appear at Western film festivals until his death on July 24, 1978. He and the Riders are honored in the Western Music Association Hall of Fame.