

A World of Accordions Museum

April, 2005

Newsletter for Members

Editor, Helmi Strahl Harrington, Ph.D.

My Note to Members

Well Friends, we have had a remarkably active few months. Just buzzing with activities, we've managed concerts, museum tours, continued library organization, shuffled and reshuffled things—pretty much like usual after all. Thank you to everyone who has helped with the myriad chores, and who has contributed to our larger goals in other ways.

Viatcheslav Semyonov in Concert and Master Class—Oh What a Trip!

One of the world's greatest artists, Viatcheslav Semyonov (Moscow, Russia), appeared in Concert on March 19, 2005. Semyonov is renowned for his interpretive artistry on the bayan and is famed as a great contemporary composer. Semyonov's compositions for bayan are regularly included in major competitive events, and are favored among concert performers. He was awarded the title of "Artist of the Soviet People," heads the Folk Instruments division of the Gnessin Institute and heads the Rostov Academy. His insight into technical mastery and interpretive finesse goes yet further: a hefty percentage of world competition champions are his students!

Together with his wife Natalie who plays the domra, the Semyonovs have produced CDs that are best sellers among classical aficionados as well as folk music fans. He was most gracious in donating a set of his CDs to our *Accordion Resource Center Library*.

It was because of his new composition "Divertimento," commissioned by the American Accordionists' Association in honor of Faithe Deffner, that he premiered the work in this USA tour. "Divertimento" is written for **piano accordion** and contains three movements entitled "Legend," "Nostalgia," and "Journey." It is without doubt one of the most important new compositions in the repertory. It will be published by, and available through Deffner Publications.

Semyonov's concert for us was nearly miraculous! It did have a rough start! Instead of having been sent to Duluth's airport from his prior event in Kansas City, we were told he would be flown to Ironwood, MI, about two hours northeast of Superior. Except that his scheduled arrival was already close to performance time, this would have worked out alright, so volunteer Emil Meitzner was there to meet the plane. In reality, however, someone mis-booked Semyonov into Iron Mountain, MI, **FIVE-AND-A-HALF HOURS** away! Our shock was followed by a couple of frenzied hours trying to establish communication (which required help from the Sheriff's Office and local constabulary) while Emil sped his way to Iron Mountain and then back to Superior.

Now back at the Concert Hall we were all waiting. At 7:00 PM, I announced the problem to the audience, some of whom had themselves driven up to six hours or flown in for the concert. I asked the students prepared for the Master Class (which should have taken place at 5:00 PM) to present their pieces. Then Carolyn Carver and I played for awhile. Eventually, we offered refunds and about a third of the audience went home. Others milled around the Museum, determined to wait it out.

At 9:10 PM, Semyonov and Emil entered the concert hall to rousing cheers from the remaining audience. By 9:30 PM Semyonov was onstage announcing a reduced program due to the lateness of the hour



and “the worst day of his life.” Instead, however, he gave a full program and three encores to an audience so enthusiastic that they hardly got off their feet with standing ovations and cheers. That acclaim must have given strength.

Later, Semyonov told me he had been up since 5:00 AM, had eaten only one sandwich all day, and he was clearly racked with flu!

After a good night’s sleep, he offered a marvelous Master Class for four of the six students selected to perform: Gina Jennissen (Minneapolis, MN), Dan Turpening (Minneapolis, MN), Benjamin Lang (Holman, WI), and Paul Vargason (Superior, WI). Clare Hansen (Tofte, MN) and John Bispala (Minneapolis, MN) were not able to stay overnight.

I drove Semyonov to the Minneapolis airport for his return to New York and Moscow. It was a stimulating drive—great conversation and many insights into contemporary life in Russia. **Special thanks** to those who helped sponsor this remarkable concert event: Rob Dingmann, Jeff and Carrie Millikan, Roger and Joy Schmitz, John Bispala, and The City of Superior. Do look at our website for more information.

Henry Doktorski Concert—Lecture—Celebratory Installation of Deiro Accordions

Every time I hear Henry Doktorski play I am yet more impressed with his clean articulations of demanding virtuoso music. His program, in celebration of the installation of two performance instruments from vaudeville greats Guido and Pietro Deiro, was chosen from their original compositions. These repertoires require of the performer fast fingers and acute perception of style—even humor in music. Henry shows his skills masterfully and proves that he should be considered **THE** specialist of this era.

Preceding the concert, Henry offered a lecture-demonstration that concerned not only the music but also life-events and personalities of the brothers Deiro. Henry's depictions brought these two men to life—real people with strengths and foibles. Our admiration for their permanent contributions to accordion Americana is heightened by awareness of whirlwinds in professional careers and in personal evolutions.

The audience remained fascinated throughout Henry's lively narrative. But he did more than speak, he also demonstrated the sound of original compositions on the performance instruments of Guido and Pietro. The 1917 and 1926 Guerrini accordions were subsequently disassembled and shown to audience members. In the audience were several former students of each brother. Invited to participate through personal reminiscences and tidbits of history, they further sparked the event.

Among the landmark events in the history of *A World of Accordions Museum* must be counted the installation of two Guerrini piano accordions used by the Deiros. Through the recommendations of Henry Doktorski, Count Guido Roberto Deiro (son of Guido Deiro) and Sandra Deiro Cattani (granddaughter of Pietro Deiro) donated personal performance instruments of their forebears for display to a larger public. We gratefully recognize their generosity and hope that their trust will be celebrated through enhanced public awareness of two great figures in American accordion history.

During his visit to *A World of Accordions Museum* in July of 2003, Henry was inspired to encourage moving Guido Deiro's accordion out of CUNY storage. Count Deiro then suggested Mrs. Cattani also contribute to The Brothers Deiro display. The instruments have been placed in the *Duane Sellman Special Exhibits Area*, part of the *Hanni Strahl Concert Hall*, next to displays about Charles Magnante, Hugo Herrmann, Friedrich Lips, and Pietro Frosini (pending).

Both accordions will soon enjoy museum quality restoration and then will be included in performances and exhibits at major accordion events throughout the USA through *A World of Accordions Traveling Museum*.

Be sure to order Henry's book [The Brothers Deiro](#), and his two-CDs set of Guido Deiro recordings from his website. These are must-have additions to every library. Also look at our website for more information about Henry Doktorski at Harrington ARTS Center.



Florian Chmielewski Celebrates 60 Years of Accordion Music In Benefit Concerts for the Museum

Another FIRST and landmark event for the Museum was provided by longtime friend Florian Chmielewski, former Minnesota Senator and beloved popular entertainer. Florian has been a friend of ARTS and AWAM since their beginnings. During our Christmas 2004 recital, in which pianist granddaughter Lexi Devitt performed, Florian was moved to volunteer a day of concerts for the benefit of the Museum. The idea quickly escalated to a celebration of Florian's 60 years playing accordion, and then it rose further to a reunion of Chmielewski Fun Time Family Band members.

We have never yet experienced such generosity! Florian spoke about the event at all his intervening performances, and he contacted dozens of media people in promotion. He called for donations that came from far and near, old friends and new. He provided wonderful prizes for the raffle that brought additional attention and resources. He contributed pictures, recordings and documents for our "Chmielewski Wall." He mustered the participant performers from their busy schedules and put together two concerts that filled our hall with people and enthusiasm. As I consider how much effort and commitment it took for him to make this happen, I get goose-flesh. After all, it looks so simple when you're in the audience having a good time, but months of planning are invisible, as are the years of stage experience that make everything go smoothly.

The Chmielewski family was enlarged by several others. Here is a list of the participants:

Chester Chmielewski - Played drums from 1945 – 1965. Currently he plays the concertina and resides in Sturgeon Lake, MN.

Leonard Chmielewski – Played saxophone from 1945 – 1950 and then played the accordion from 1950 – 1954 while his brother Florian was in the Air Force. He made many guest appearances throughout the years until he passed away in February, 2005 in Casselbury, FL.

Donnie Chmielewski – Played trumpet from 1945 – 1965 and currently resides in Coon Rapids, MN.

Jerry Chmielewski – Played saxophone and drums from 1946–1980. He promoted worldwide Chmielewski Band tours to various countries. In 2004, he returned from Las Vegas, NV to perform on a more regular basis. He currently resides in Amery, WI.

Lorren Lindvig – Started his TV career with the Westernaires. Has played the accordion with Chmielewski Band for the past 40 years.

Pat Cadigan – Played bass guitar and was Master of Ceremonies from 1967 – 1980 for the Chmielewski Funtime Television Show Band.

Matt Vorderbruggen – Played the banjo for 6 years with the Chmielewski Funtime Band. Currently has a role in an upcoming movie filmed on the Iron Range.

Pat Chmielewski – She did everything from playing drums to sewing all of the dance costumes. She was married to Florian for 47 years before she passed away in September, 2003.

Florian Chmielewski Jr. – Voted #1 trumpet player in 1988 and 1989 from Minnesota Music Academy. Voted #1 accordionist in 1989 from the Minnesota Music Academy. He currently resides in Oak Grove, MN.

Mark Chmielewski – Recognized by the Minnesota Music Academy for outstanding trumpet and banjo in 1988 and 1989. He currently resides in Champlin, MN.

Patty Chmielewski-Devitt – Recorded "I've Got a Polish Boyfriend" at the age of 7. Was inducted into the Ironworld Music Hall of Fame in 2003. Plays saxophone and drums along with vocals. She currently resides in Apple Valley, MN.

Nick Devitt – Loves to play drums with his Grandpa. He is featured trumpet and drummer for Valley Middle School and Jazz Band.

Lexi Devitt – Plays piano with her Grandpa with instruction by Helmi Harrington, Ph.D. Also plays French horn and does vocals for Westview Elementary School.

Kati Devitt – She is the youngest Chmielewski Grandchild. She made her first recording at the age of 3 entitled "Another Generation".

What a list of celebrities! Of course, the youngsters stole the show!

We at the Museum also did our part. My students sold tickets, put up posters and told all their friends. Volunteers Audrey Meitzner, Barbara Vargason and Sue Porter served lunch to all those who paid a few dollars for Sloppy Joe sandwiches (donated by David Ford) and goodies on the lunch platter. Dave Hagemann, Emil Meitzner, and my son Charlie (who flew from Texas just to attend) took tickets, operated cameras, manned the Gift Shop, etc. Yvonne Marts (Fergus Falls, MN) gave Museum tours and TV interviews. Shelby Setniker-Eschiti (Minneapolis) and Ronny Setniker (Biwabic) provided strolling button-diatonic music in the Museum.

All in all, this was a day to remember! Our heartfelt thanks are extended to all. Small tokens of our appreciation are being mailed to the Chmielewskis along with a wall-plaque in commemoration.

The event has additional significance for me—I saw the hall named in honor of my mother filled to a previously unequalled extent. It resounded with happy music and delighted applause. And that made my heart smile. (Please see our website for additional information.)

Noteworthy Acquisitions



This instrument was introduced to me by Dan and Joan Grauman (Rockville, MD). It had been brought to them by someone who wanted to sell it at a price beyond our resources. The Graumans were convinced that it deserved to become part of the Museum, where it fills a gap in our displays, so they made the donation.

It is a Demian-type “Flutina” marked with the Busson stamp indicating its French origin of ca. 1830-50s. Its condition is excellent, though some restoration is still necessary before use in performances.

Be sure to look for Grauman’s musical products (Squeezin’ Arts) at your next visit to a national accordion convention.

Long-time friend of the Museum and “Accordion Lady of Fergus Falls” Yvonne Marts brought three accordions to the Museum when she came to attend the Semyonov concert. Among them are a piano accordion “Verdi” from the 1920-30s, a Stamirowski diatonic from the 1880s, and the Crucianelli pictured here. This was her first purchase “find” after her studies at ARTS, from which she graduated in 1995. It has special significance for us both, because I have long hoped it would join the Crucianelli displays where it is now honored.



Laura J. Krol (Chicago, IL) contacted me after seeing our website and deciding that her mother’s accordion deserved a place in history. The Sisters Monforte performed in vaudeville in the 1930s. Photographs and the family story are displayed alongside the well-preserved chromatic 3-row Morbidoni “United.”. This instrument appears to have been manufactured in the 1950s. It is an unusual example because most manufacturers had moved to round keys in five rows by this time.

Harrington Arts Center Publications

Our in-house publications are in full swing. We now offer the following books:

Charles Magnante: America’s Great Accordionist, Third Edition. CD of 21 pieces included. \$40.00.

Helmi’s Handouts (2004). ca. 150 p. with indexed divisions. \$25.00.

Selected Favorites for Free-Bass Accordion: Quint- Converter Edition (2004). 17 pieces, 33 p. plus Appendices.

\$15.00.

Christmas Carol Favorites for Quint Converter (2004). 19 pieces, 33 p. \$15.00.

Away from home Appearances

- May 16 AWAM Traveling Museum workshop for Chicago Accordion Club.
May 17 AWAM Traveling Museum workshop for Milwaukee Accordion Club.
June 24-26 Ironworld Polkafest, Chisholm, MN, three days of workshops, performances and AWAM Traveling Museum .
July 6-10 American Accordionists' Association International Competition and Festival, Dearborn, MI. AWAM Traveling Museum and workshops.

Carolyn Carver will entertain with me before the Club meetings and my workshops.
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Upcoming Events

August 19-20-21 **First Mid-West Regional All-Accordions and All-Concertinas Festival.**
Here at HARTS ! Plan to come, play, attend workshops, participate in competitions, and meet new friends in all the instrument-family styles and disciplines. Dee Langley and I are working together to coordinate participation by the Minnesota Accordion Club, New Prague Concertina Club, Glencoe Button Box Club, and studio students, among others. Help us make the event successful and informative for our region !

Watch www.accordionworld.org for new announcements !