

A World of Accordions Museum

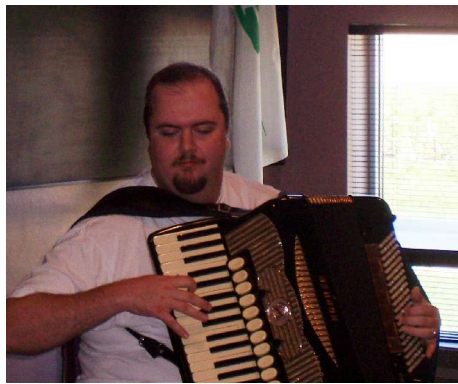
September, 2005 Newsletter for Members

Editor, Helmi Strahl Harrington, Ph.D.

My Note to Members

At the end of June, the Traveling Museum appeared at *Ironworld USA* for their “**Polkafest**”—about the 10th year in a row! For three full days, we made music, showed antique and special accordions, presented workshops, and talked with many accordion enthusiasts. This is one of our most favored of events—we meet the nicest people, chat and perform with the “Stars” that appear as headliners, and prepare new concert programs. This year I was pleased that Florian Chmielewski and Family, Toby Hanson, among others, stopped in to visit and perform. I also met Toby’s wife who sings with the group “Smiling Scandinavians.” Check out our impressive schedule on our website.

Special thanks to Audrey Meitzner and Ben Lang for their extraordinary efforts in helping with this event.



Toby Hansen (Seattle)



Roberta and Walt Leu with display segment

Two weeks later, we appeared at the **American Accordionists’ Association Competition and Festival** in Dearborn, MI. The setting was splendid, everything ran smoothly, and it was made more exciting because our Benjamin Lang had entered the International Entertainment Competition funded by Steve Stolaruk in memory of his wife Vivian Vivo Stolaruk. Here appeared a brilliant array of accordionists focusing on entertainment styles—professional and amateur—from many different countries as well as America.

While all aspects of AAA festivals are important, I will remember this one as offering the widest spectrum of the most visible of accordionistic occupations—the entertainment virtuoso. From the dramatic Dick Contino show onward, such an assortment of performances, presentation styles, and repertory choices has perhaps never been seen in a single convention. Stunning, brilliant, exciting, awe-inspiring—an extraordinary opportunity to see a half-century evolution in concepts of what accordionists are.

I am awed that young aspiring artists I have heard at past events, who have

traditionally thumbed noses at the idea of making music for mere entertainment, who had no idea of need for differences in performer-audience relationships, consented to perform their conventional concert repertory in this category because the prize monies were enticing. The highest prize money ever awarded to an accordionist (to my knowledge) rewarded this competition. In itself, this is a bit ironic.

On the one hand, most accordionists reaching professional status realize a necessity to please the audience for which service is proffered. Most also realize some divergence in the path that leads to the serious concert stage vs. the stage of popular, mass-audience appeal. This is not only a variance in repertoires, but also one of stage behaviors. Presuming that players realize technical competence is mandatory (arguably the lines of division between entertainer and artist may be foggy) the internal self-holding or acquired mannerisms project as clearly as a label announcement. In previous decades, success in entertainment fields was evidenced by employment in prestigious locales, which influenced even more repertory choices and applause-getting techniques. Let's not forget that our honored pioneers (Charles Magnante, Pietro Frosini, the Deiros, and many others) were unabashed entertainers, proud of their abilities to manipulate current tunes in original ways. Later, we called them artists who shaped for Americans and the world what was meant by the term "accordionist." These artists appeared in Carnegie Hall and similar venues for popular—and more importantly—elite audiences.

On the other hand, in our anxious furtherance of highest standards of accordion excellence, students are often encouraged into a direction in which very few living wages can be earned, while denigrating the role of entertainment professionals. For the largest percentage of educated musicians, jobs will not be found in celebrated symphonies but in common locales. Not enough, but several institutions of higher education offer curricula in accordion studies relating to serious, concert stage repertory. Fewer yet encourage or train realistically for success in our culture. The problem is inherent in teaching systems: pianists who cannot play a lounge arrangement, accordionists who cannot sight-read and would not play pop. It is simply presumed that the skills that serve one field also serve the other. They do not! What is surely not appreciated is the psychological dilemma confronting the student who is not likely to function in the "highest" arena, and is not emotionally equipped to "lower" himself to other more practical proficiencies.

Only a few Americans have melded formal concert manners with personality-infused stage presence. In the 1980s I was fortunate to attend an AAA convention in Atlantic City where Dr. Carmelo Pino opened my mind to acoustic and MIDI accordions in pop music. Carmelo is a musician of high rank, a composer of noteworthy historic consequence, who none-the-less found use and need for such wide-ranging abilities. Certainly Palmer and Hughes understood what was necessary. Coupe Mondiale participants like "K Trio" members, Larry Malmberg, Skeets Langley, among others, have made the transition. Stas Venglevski has also come to meld the disciplined skills of Russian training in his compositions of distinctly entertainment-appeal. Peter Soave, winner of the 1989 Coupe Mondiale, has more recently achieved world-regard

Dr. Carmelo Pino visited the Museum prior to the Minneapolis AAA Festival of 2002, He participated and performed for us in April, 2004 during Grand ReOpening ceremonies.

Stas has performed at HARTS on several occasions, and is scheduled with Friedrich Lips for Sept. 24, 2006.

Peter Soave may be presented in March, 2006.

predominantly through music by Astor Piazzola and “Tango Nuevo”—and on the bandonion at that!

Well, the Stolaruk Competition showed us a spectrum, and the panel of judges defined the dichotomy. While I would have liked to see more acknowledgment for a person like EvAnn Dahl, of Pennsylvanians success and a person of extraordinary modern repertory breadth, while I am not fond of pink hair and yellow accordions, while I am not fond of bumper-sticker decorations on accordions, and while I recognize emerging sweethearts who are almost predestined to win, I have no objections to LeFevre’s sinuous body gyrations and stylish polish because his technical accomplishments were fittingly great. He was clearly the audience favorite.

So perhaps the lesson to be understood from the entire exercise is that artistic virtuosity is a mandate, and so is an appealing stage presence. Not too different from Dick Contino after all.

BTW, while Ben did not win, he did receive “Honorable Mention” and a smart, accompanying check. In other competitive events Ben played well and won numerous trophies. He was also featured in his local newspaper, “Holmen Courier.” Great press for an accomplishing young man.

Both my children, Hanni Van Zandt and Charles Harrington, accompanied by Krystal Wolfe, participated in performances and competitions at the festival. They also helped with mundane requirements of the AWAM display. This was perhaps the most elaborate display I ever set up. Although the display area was constricted, as was the room in general where we were set up with vendors, I believe we informed many area visitors as well as convention goers, amazed by beautiful instruments and complexities of the instrument family.

The four apprentices in this summer’s ARTS program made major improvements in the organization of our building. They reorganized the Gift Shop, cleared out storage areas to provide an inventory (instruments for sale) display room, carried many accordions, accessories, and miscellaneous items from one floor to another, erected shelving, and rearranged things sensibly and effectively. Their impact on the libraries is most remarkable. The music files are actually useable, CDs and books are better placed and organized, items yet to be filed are gathered in a single area. Bravo!

Paul Vargason continues on as apprentice at ARTS. Although Paul has another year of high school, he will spend a day a week continuing to learn repair skills



Gift Shop



Inventory Showroom

Noteworthy Acquisitions

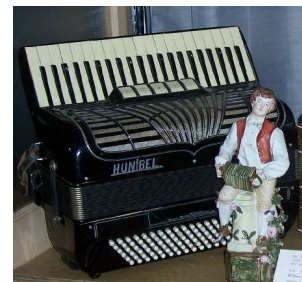
A few years ago Mr. and Mrs. Al Ceruti from Thunder Bay, Ontario, came by to visit the museum. They noticed the paltry few items in our “Canada Display”, and offered to try to get a significant donation. Well—did they ever come through! When they called to announce their visit, the donation accordion was described. It turned out to be much better than expected! What looked like a 4-row chromatic turned out to be a semitone in two duplicating rows. Beautifully sparkling in virtually perfect glitter gold celluloid with rhinestones and scroll-cut grill and key-bed pieces, it carries the name “A. Baldovin, Fort Wayne, Ontario.” The nickel-silver grill features two semi-nude ladies, another delightful example of ornament choices from the 1920s-30s era.



We immediately began restoration and preservation procedures on this rare instrument—the only of its kind that I have ever seen. The instrument is important for several reasons: first because it is an example of the few known Canadian accordion makers; second, because of its surprising keyboard organization. In the main display cabinet, its neighbor is another form of semitone (below).

Here is an example segment of the treble organization:

C# D# F G A B C# D# etc.
 D E F# G# A# C
 C# D# F G A B C# D# etc.
 D E F# G# A# C



We can all be grateful to the Cerutis for persuading Mrs. William (Joan) Rea, also of Thunder Bay, to donate this instrument to AWAM. Thank you for your generosity and foresight.



We gratefully accepted another donated instrument from Robert Gulish, who had previously donated our Maugain four-row chromatic musette. This year he brought us an Italo American with internal shutter for artificial bellow shake/tremolo. It is presently on the work-table being restored and will soon join the “Tremolo Instruments” display.

We continue to receive music from Frank Gaviani, Jr, whose famous father contributed so much to the development of accordion virtuosity in America. Mr. Gaviani, Jr., has shipped to us a nearly-complete collection of arrangements published and unpublished music, photos, programs, books and other items of importance to historic preservation.

He has recently begun sending the complete output of Pagani Publications—a most valuable asset to scholars and players. Just think what this means—the entire yield of a publishing house that for decades led the accordion world—at our fingertips. We have dedicated special filers for the Pagani collection. We gratefully acknowledge this generous and major donor.

Thanks to volunteer Roberta Leu (Cloquet, MN), we acquired 23 filing cabinets discarded by the Duluth Aquarium. Roberta and daughter Marie hauled them over and helped set them up. We now have ample space for the thousands of documents and music that were previously so cramped.

Recent Activities

Our first annual **MidWest Regional Free-Reed Festival** was a fine success. For two full days we had concerts, workshops, and jam sessions that influenced all those that attended and participated. We had a marvelous assortment of solo and in ensemble free-reed players. Here’s a short list of the offerings (please notice the many instruments used together with the accordion family):

Concerts:

Sue Spencer and Jim Ofsthun with Newfoundland Irish and original music, BD with bodrun , guitar, vocals, percussion
Karen Majewicz played with Andy on his musical saw,
The Little Ripley Band (members of Roberta Leu’s family) combined accordion, concertina, guitar, keyboard and percussion,
Lorren Lindevig on PA and BD, vocals and humor
Dee Langley in solo, and with her student Eric Ray on PA
Eric Ray on BD and PA
Paul Vargason on PA and BD, with duets w HH
Ben Lang, solo
Shelby Eschiti on PA and BD
Carolyn Carver and Helmi Harrington
Yvonne Marts. PA on her original music

Ron Askegaard (PA and BC) and Darla Bartley (cello)

Workshop/Seminars:

Dee Langley on Polka Styles

Karen Majewicz demonstrating many types of acc-fam-instr

HH on Your First lesson on BD

Your first lesson on BC

Memorization

It's not written in the Notes

Don Peterson gave us a harmonica demonstration,

Open Mike and Jam Sessions

We are grateful to everyone who contributed talents and industry, and we look forward to a larger, better-publicized event next year. Be sure to look up the complete, impressive schedule on our website. Anyone who saw the music library even a few months ago would be amazed to know that we used the room for jam-sessions and workshops!. There was actually floor space for circles of people, their accordions and music stands. We're not finished yet, but oh, so much further along.

Update Goals

While we still plan to construct an anechoic chamber, it may be displaced in immediacy by the need to display our electronic accordions on the main-floor area of the museum. At present, we have collected this important area of accordion evolution on the 3rd floor, inaccessible to most visitors. We could make it a real part of the Museum if we were to refit the building's janitorial room. There we hope to set them up with their sound modules as befits their prominence and contemporary importance. If you can help with a day or two of manual labor, special skills, supplies or money, please contact us.

Special Requests

It has become evident that new students into the ARTS courses need financial help for their studies. This is not a new problem—it is an issue for most students during higher-education years. I, for example, would not have been able to get through 14 years of college without help, and I daresay I have not disappointed my institutions or their supporters that invested in societal goals.

Please consider contributing whatever you can afford to our **Scholarship Fund**, or even better, insure a worthy person enters the workforce of our industry through donation of \$10,000 tuition fees, \$3,000 supplies/tools, or other stipend.

We are actively collecting photos of accordionists and locales of performance. If you are reluctant to contribute your originals, we encourage you to send us scans or photocopies. As incentive for your efforts, we will offer half-price museum tours, or 25% discounts from our Gift Shop.

New Friends

AWAM was recently visited by a party of folks that included “Buddy” Herod, whose acquaintanceship with New Ulm, Minnesota, concertinists and accordionists was delightfully informative.

We Mourn The Loss

Myron Floren, one of America’s most prominent and beloved accordionists, passed away July 23, 2005. Myron was considered a family friend by people who saw him on the Lawrence Welk Shows or in the hundreds of live performances of his annual schedule. My family is no different. He knew my daughter since she was a babe in arms; he graciously corresponded with her for decades. I was fortunate to have had many opportunities to play with him, usually without any preparatory rehearsal. He was a truly gentle man, and a first-class representative for the accordion. Myron visited the Accordion and Concertina Repair Department at Red Wing Technical College (1992), and AWAM in Duluth (1995/6) as well as in Superior (2003). He had promised the Museum two of his accordions, his first being a two-row button diatonic. We hope his heirs and estate will honor his wishes and provide us with substance for a meaningful “Myron Floren Display.”

Elsie Bennett, long time chair of the AAA Commissioning Committee, and influential in many aspects of the American accordion environment, died September 3, 2005, following a stroke. Elsie’s last years were spent in frail health while she worked to sort through a lifetime of paperwork. She sent to the museum several boxes of LP records, correspondence with various music-world figures, AAA Competition documents, and similar items of historic interest. Be sure to enjoy “Elsie’s Corner” at the NW corner of the main floor, and at the Obicon painting in the Concert hall.

Upcoming Events

Stas and Misha Litvin, (Bayan and Domra) Concert September 24, 2005
Los Gauchos de Roldan, (Uruguay) Concert October 2, 2005.
Willowgreen and Scott Jones in “Give and Live” Benefit Concert, September 30, 2005
Michelle Gribbon and HH in concerts preceding Russia trip (Watch our website for details)

Russia trip: Dec 10-19, 2005, for 4th Moscow International Competition for Bayan and Accordion.

Harrington Arts Center Publications

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.

PLEASE NOTICE

**The Museum will be closed Dec. 9, to Jan. 2,
2006.**

Watch www.accordionworld.org for new announcements !