

# BAAAC PAGE

Dedicated to the accordion through fun, service & education

## April 2001: A Solid Show

By Paul A. Magistretti

Bob Berta began the meeting by informing us that he and Valerie Kieser were going to try and organize our line-up of talent in the future [see elsewhere in this issue]. One idea is particularly

intriguing: Joe Smiell might write a simple original piece which can be printed in the newsletter and we'll look for our many and diverse talented performers to give us *their* version of this piece never before heard. It's what they do in the Van Cliburn Piano Competition where they commission a new piece of

ever picked up the instrument have performed at BAAC. What other club has had concerts by Soave, Lips and Semenov? Farnen and Sundqvist? Veikko? Frank Marocco? Hey, Lou Fanucchi played the complete *Rhapsody in Blue* superbly for us. If we haven't received our just due of fame and fortune for such achievements that doesn't preclude the responsibility of continuing the effort.

Lou Soper suggested that anyone who wants to help us continue as a club should consider volunteering their services. Also, if anyone would be a patron of our scholarship and performance funds that would be great. We're only as good as you make us. Lou called attention to Tom Torriglia's *Day of the Accordion* in June [see calendar]. He wanted our members to know about Kimric Smythe's fundraiser on April 28<sup>th</sup> [see more elsewhere in this issue].

Then, it was showtime & a return to the good old days. Domenic Saso took over as MC. He's always fresh and enthusiastic and his jokes are old enough to qualify as ancient wisdom. He said his recent absence was due to a tear duct operation—a process he had to endure even though

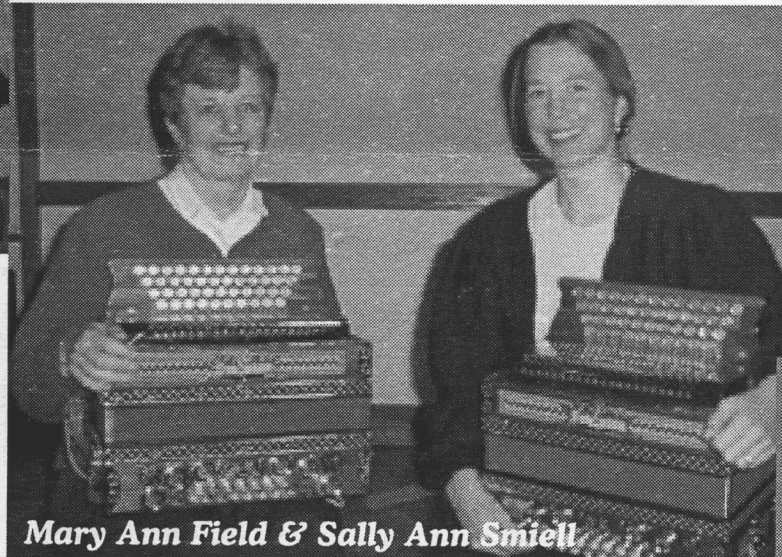


**Bruce Sherman**

music so that the performers have nothing to refer to except the printed form and each player debuts their original *take* on the tune.

It was brought to our attention, too, that we've never had a group photo taken of BAAC members. So, there will be a night when we'd like as many of our members as possible to attend and get snapped. It's a shame we haven't done it through the years. We've had a lot of wonderful members and some regretfully are no longer with us. Frank Schlotter, our historian, asked our members to contact him if anyone has photos from the past they're willing to make copies of for the club. Also, could anyone help him identify people in some of the pictures he's already collected—if you have a good eye and a fertile memory contact Frank at 510 339-1163, or [colcordi@jong.com](mailto:colcordi@jong.com).

Bob then announced something I thought was a bad move: that BAAC would avoid professional performers in the future. What has made our club great has been the appearance of some of the world's greatest players performing under our roof—no other club has done as much to bring the world's greatest talent to the Bay Area. We've had virtuosi from Russia, China, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Azerbaijan, Finland and other countries—think of it! And what about American geniuses like Galla-Rini, Doktorski, Klucsevsek, Fanucchi, Soave, Ohlendorf, Marocco, Van Damme and many more. The most talented people who've



**Mary Ann Field & Sally Ann Smiell**

everyone thought he was crying when he played and that was a big boost to his career. He introduced the evening's first artist, a BAAC member and a solid performer on both the concertina and two-row buttonbox, Bruce Sherman. Bruce performs at the Maritime Museum and appropriately offered us Sea Chanties and Hornpipes—*Off to California, Liverpool Beauties* (which he sang) and another nice vocal on the amusing *Strike the Bell*. *Bell* was a song about how time was marked on sailing vessels by striking bells; however, the seamen were often deceived into inordinately long watches by a bos'n who skipped a timely strike or two. The lyrics depicted the agony of 19<sup>th</sup> century clock watching (or, time hearing). Bruce's whole performance was a nice window into a bygone age and



**Frank Montoro**

(Next page)

**(Solid cont'd)**

he's a talented performer. He creates a context, sets a mood and fulfills the moment with warmth and humor. As an aside he mentioned he bought his first buttonbox from Vince Cirelli in 1968.

Frank Montoro is always a pleasure. He did a fine rendition of *Harlem Nocturne*, a tune that usually plays on the sound track of any good film noir. Recently, in fact, they used it on the *Mickey Spillane* TV show starring Stacy Keach. It's usually played on a breathy, reedy sax and it gets real down and dirty, but Frank didn't lack grit or feeling, even if free reeds can't take off their clothes and wiggle like a sax. He followed up with Leroy Anderson's *Trumpeter's Lullaby*, a triple tonguing tune that horn players develop chops over, moved on to *Farewell Granada* and ended with *Te Quiero Morena*, the latter (I think) translating as "I love you my dark, swarthy lady." Frank, as usual, played with affection and feeling to spare—whenever he picks up his accordion we're fortunate.

After intermission Lou announced that there will be **no meeting in July** due to our regular date falling on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Instead, we'll have our annual picnic at Nature Friends Park in Oakland on the 8th—we've gone there the past several years and it's an excellent location—close to the recently opened Chabot Observatory in the Oakland hills.

Beginning the second half was **Joe Domitrovich**, a talented, professional accordionist from Cupertino. Tonight he regaled us on his Concerto MIDI. He used all this fine instrument's bells and whistles with taste and talent. But what was really impressive was that beneath a brilliant surface of sounds there was a superb musician. In fact, he whetted my appetite to hear him return



sometime with just an acoustic accordion, so we can enjoy the totality of his talent. Joe played Frosini's *Jolly Caballero*, and included guitar and trumpet sounds along with a bellows shake. *Dark Eyes* featured his own variations and combined a range moods from tippy gypsies to symphonic sobriety. He did *Dueling Banjos* with a twist: a dueling banjo (treble) meets a violin (bass), not a fiddle, mind you; it was sort of an off-center conflict, like Gomer Pyle meets Jascha Heifetz.

Joe plays with a lot of taste and something that's usually missing in accordion performances: humor. It was refreshing. His next selection was a medley of train songs that included simulations of an engine getting up speed along with snatches of *Orange Blossom Special* and *Freight Train*; he took us right up to the moment when the train comes to a stop and blows its whistle. His final piece was a Slovenian or "Cleveland Style" polka with vocal, which Joe dedicated to Bill and Naomi Drude. I liked his singing and there's something about the Slovenian language that imparts soul to the polka better than anything else.

Following Joe Domitrovich the BAAC Ensemble (16 strong) took the stage, or rather the orchestra pit. They offered us three interesting pieces—two by Mozart, a rondo and an aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*, separated by an original polka by Joe, which the Ensemble calls *Polka 2000*. Joe introduced the music in his always-interesting manner telling us how Wolfgang's rival Salieri tried to convince Mozart's singers that the music in *Figaro* was "unsingable," and that they should revolt. The wily rival succeeded

in stirring up some trouble in the ranks, but after a few rehearsals, Mozart conducting, the singers realized the beauty of the music, "got it," and no one's looked back for three hundred years.

BAAC Ensemble's Mozart was solid. *Polka 2000*, as Joe confessed, is a work in progress—he added that while polkas are meat



and potatoes for accordionists as solos and duets, it ain't so easy with a group of sixteen. I thought they did a good job.

The last act was Lou Soper's *The Cabletones*, comprised of Lou, Al Avakian (bass) and Bill Baillie (clarinet). But Lou didn't take the stage; instead, he invited members who had never (or rarely) played with professional accompaniment to *come on down* and take his guys for a spin. Dennis Stoscher, never a shrinking violet, was first and acquitted himself quite well with *Moonglow* and *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You*.

Accordionists, possessing an orchestra in a box, rarely get a chance to play with other instruments. At the most we tussle with other accordionists (sometimes to a musical standoff), but a sudden and/or virginal *mano a mano* with bass and clarinet can hit Lone Rangers like a bazooka in the obbligato. Dennis looked a little like Myron Floren caught in headlights at first, but he settled down and did just fine. George Johnstone was next and played *What's New* and we heard his tasteful chord voicings in a different context from last month's solos. If George will just begin to project



his playing more, he'll be a solid crowd pleaser. Finally, Bob Delgado did *Roseland*. It seemed to be a different experience for Bob, too—but you have to realize all our guys were hitting the ground cold without even a once over lightly rehearsal. Bob is certainly one of the club's most accomplished players; so while the first few moments of the group experience had him off balance, it didn't take long until he warmed up and rendered a solid performance. I thought tonight's experiment was good all around—Lou's guys gave us a treat—I'd like to see more of this kind of thing.

Finally, Lou took over his group & all three in blue polo shirts and gray slacks donned snap-brim white hats, so we knew who the good guys were. They opened with *String of Pearls* and created a nice Glenn Miller mood. Then, mentioning the recent TV presentation of *South Pacific*, they gave us a medley of songs from it: vocals on *Honey Bun*, *There is Nothing Like a Dame* (Bill Bailey did some nice character vocalizing with Lou) and an instrumental of *Bali Ha'i*. They finally took us deep into the Swing Era with *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You*, *Moonlight Serenade* and *Avalon*. Lou has an accomplished and appealing group and it was nice of him and the guys to come and entertain us.

# Accordions al dente

By Tom Torriglia

Well, I see that my column has made the cut in this newsletter. First off, I want to tell you that I had a blast performing at the Accordion Club of the Redwoods (ACR) last month. Although I was extremely nervous I managed to get through three originals; *The Pasta Song*, *Isabella* and of course, *The Polka Jamboree*. Thanks to everyone. I like the ACR meetings. They are in a small, packed, well-lighted room. I like the coziness.

My web site, [www.ladyofspain.com](http://www.ladyofspain.com) now accepts Visa and Mastercard. So, there's no reason for you not to rush out and purchase the (hopefully, very expensive) accordion of your dreams. Over 700 pieces of sheet music; plus instructional books, songbooks and more! You'll shop for days. Check it out.

Anyway, let's get serious. I rant and rave about how I feel that the Bay Area Accordion Club (BAAC) should try this or be involved with that, when in fact, why does BAAC need to be involved with anything? I decided to go to the BAAC website to see if its mission statement was listed and what its goals were. In case you didn't know, the website is located at: [www.baaccordionclub.org](http://www.baaccordionclub.org). (kudos to the webmaster. It's very nicely laid out and easy to navigate). Well, it states that BAAC is "dedicated to the enjoyment, promotion and support of the accordion through fun, service and education." Great. I think BAAC enjoys the accordion through fun. This would explain the "fun" band and great performers at each meeting. Promotion and support? BAAC is not doing much to promote or support the accordion that I've seen.

When I conceived of National Accordion Awareness Month (June), its purpose was to act as a vehicle through which accordionists, bands, clubs, organizations or whomever, could promote and support the accordion and promote themselves and their music or causes. BAAC has nothing planned in June that I am aware of. Go to the website and see for yourself. I see the Accordion Ensemble is playing at a church, but nowhere does it say something like "celebrate National Accordion Awareness Month with the BAAC Accordion Ensemble." Not even the club's picnic is in June. I sent BAAC a letter informing them that they could rent a table at the Day of the Accordion Festival to pass out information (education=a club goal) and sell merchandise. A Board member informed me that they were thinking about getting a table at the accordion festival (supporting=a club goal), but there wasn't enough money available. So, let's see. It's an accordion club in San Francisco that's dedicated to promoting and supporting the accordion, but when it comes to participating at an Accordion

Festival in its own town it has to "think about it." In my mind, BAAC should have been the one who conceived of and put on the Festival in the first place. Well, how about next year? How about BAAC and Accordion Club of the Redwoods getting together and putting on an Accordion Festival during National Accordion Awareness Month (or dear God, sometime) somewhere between San Francisco and Petaluma? Now, that would be support, education and promotion.

So, what about *Day of the Accordion—San Francisco*? It's Sunday, June 17 and I hope you'll attend. I hope to have a very eclectic lineup. A couple of months ago, I stated that if anyone wanted to perform at the Festival to let me know. Only one person replied and as a result, that person is going to perform. I was surprised that only one person expressed interest. It's well paying and you get to sell merchandise and hang with other accordionists on a Sunday afternoon. According to BAAC's website, the BAAC Ensemble rehearses twice monthly and the BAAC Fun Band rehearses monthly. What are these bands rehearsing for? I was surprised that neither band asked about participating at the Accordion Festival.

One of the unfortunate incidents from last year's Festival was the arrival of a principal from another accordion festival who walked around passing out posters promoting his event during my band's set. I thought this was disruptive and disrespectful. It'll probably happen again.

One of the Board members printed up the club's mailing list so that the Cannery could send out notices about the Festival. This Board member stated that she thought I was going to be at the Board Meeting and was going to give me the addresses there. I had actually thought about going to a Board Meeting because someone else pointed out that I criticize the Board unfairly. I asked one Board member when the meeting was because I was thinking of going. That Board member didn't know if the general public was allowed to go. I went to the website to find out. I think he's right. The only thing about the Board is a list of who the members are. It doesn't say when they meet or if anyone can attend.

Last month, the Squeegees performed polka magic for two days at the *April in Carneros Festival* in Napa. We did a total of 8 sets. Phew! But, it was so much fun. I want to thank all the BAAC members who came by to say hi. What a party! Maybe we'll see you at the Berryessa Art and Wine festival in San Jose on May 12.

## Astor Piazzolla

[This article by an anonymous author—presumably John Gerstner, the editor of *Accordion World*—is reprinted in its entirety from the June 1936 issue of *Accordion World* (New York) & archived on The Classical Free Reed website.]

The bandoneon is an instrument which has achieved a great popularity in South America. This is partly due, no doubt, to the fact that it is so suited to the haunting rhythm of tango music. It is not so well known in the United States, but there are a few bandoneon artists in this country. Among them, despite his youth, is Astor Piazzolla.



Fifteen years ago this musician was born in Mar-del-Plata, Buenos Aires. When he was about nine years of age, he came with his parents to New York City, where he has made his home ever since. The Piazzolla family, being musically inclined, did not forget the instrument they had heard so frequently in their native land, and as a result, Astor for the

past five years has been studying and playing the bandoneon.

There are very few teachers of the bandoneon in New York

City. It is much harder to learn than the piano accordion. It is also rather difficult to secure music for this instrument, as it is printed only in South America. Astor uses piano music, somewhat revised.

The instrument was invented in 1830 in Germany by a man named Uhlig. It is square in shape; has single notes on the bass side and three octaves on the right hand as well as on the bass side. It has 72 keys altogether, 36 on each side. In playing the instrument one uses four fingers on each hand. Bandoneons are all made in Germany. They cost 300 pesos in South America, or about \$100. The most famous artist of the bandoneon is Laurenz, who is a native of Argentina.

Young Astor Piazzolla has a repertoire which includes such classic numbers as *William Tell* and *Poet and Peasant* overtures. He plays solos in tango orchestras and from time to time broadcasts over short wave station W2XAF, Schenectady to South America. With this career behind him at the age of fifteen, we predict a brilliant future for this gifted young musician.

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*Theory—All Levels & Ages*  
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#### Lou Jacklich

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## President's Message

By Lou H. Soper



April already. Seems like yesterday was New Year's Eve. The Executive Board had a cost cutting meeting this month and we now have our budget in tune with our fixed expenses. Our tax-deductible funds need help and this is your opportunity to assist in providing scholarship money, performance money to bring outstanding artists and a BAAC PAGE fund to provide the membership the great quality newsletter you

have been receiving. We have more than \$7,000 presently in our bank account but this is delegated to meet our monthly expenses. Additional funds need to be raised to provide what I have just explained. If you are looking for a tax-deductible contribution to a worthy cause, please consider your accordion club. You can specify which fund you want to support, scholarship, performance or BAAC PAGE.

**May the 2nd will be our monthly meeting night** and this has been designated Ladies Night. Val Kieser (510-531-4836) and Bob Berta (650-756-8309) are in charge of the entertainment. Please contact them if you want to perform.

The monthly meeting for July will be canceled due to the fact that the first Wednesday is the 4th of July. We are having our picnic on Sunday, July the 8th at Nature Friends Park in the Oakland hills. This will replace our July meeting. You will be provided a map with directions so it will be easy to get there. We are planning a dinner to include New York steak, pasta, salad and lots of goodies plus games, a raffle and lots of great music for listening and dancing. Coffee and doughnuts will be served for early arrivals, since we will start at 10:30 A.M. The cost will be \$12 and you must make your reservations by Sunday, July 1st so we will know how many steaks to prepare.

I'm off to Detroit to make my annual visit and while there will attend the 81st birthday party for Art Van Damme hosted by Peter Soave. This should be a great blowout.

**See you on Wednesday, May 2.**

### For Sale

**Roland Keyboard Amp KC-500...\$ 350**  
**Polytone Amp #4 w/reverb.....\$ 495**  
**Roland Jv1010 Mocule.....\$ 299**  
**Oria XM600 Module.....\$ 899**  
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**Excelsior Piano Accordion**  
**AC w/Midi Handmade reeds**  
**Approx 1 year old**  
**Warranty Available.....\$ 5,495**  
**Call (925) 830-2935 Ask for Paul**

## On the E-Trail of Bob & Val

**BOB:** Paul, it looks like we have an entertainment committee—Val Kieser and me [Bob Berta]. So, why not put a blurb in the next newsletter mentioning our proposed calendar of themes? I like the idea of putting it in a special box rather than an article—that way it would be well-defined so that people would get a good sense of upcoming events. Val, I'm working on the June meeting—what do you think about musicals, movies and TV themes?

**VAL:** Sounds good!

**BOB:** There won't be a July meeting. Maybe you and I could sketch out some themes in advance. I still want to have a family night—probably a good time for that is in the fall.

**VAL:** All right.

**BOB:** That way any kids taking music at school would have time to "practice." Christmas would be ideal timing for the BAAC Ensemble/Flute Ensemble dual concert.

**VAL:** That'll work.

**Bob:** How about these themes & months:

**May—Ladies Night.**

**June—Musicals/movies/TV themes.**

**July—(no meeting)**

**August—"Hot August Nights" Songs with a summer theme like *Summertime, Cruising Down the River, Moon River, The Theme from a Summer Place, fast music, dreamy music.***

**Sept—a Dual Workshop; plus everyone brings their accordion for a group photo. BAAC Ensemble and Fun band leaders (Joe/Sharon) give a large class and the final product is one big performance that night.**

**VAL:** So far so good. What about the rest of the year?

**October—Family night.**

**November—"It's not your father's ethnic night"; play any ethnic tune except those identified with your nationality.**

**VAL:** I want to see Frank Schotter in a grass skirt.

**December—our Dual Xmas concert: Performers from BAAC and the Flute Ensemble from Canada College (it's a great group).**

**January—Student night.**

**February—"Simply Music" night: a tune printed in the previous newsletter is to be played as one of the numbers by many different performers—It's played as written, or done as your own arrangement. Joe and our jazz experts could show how far you can take a simple tune and embellish it adding harmony, ornamentation, variations, etc.**

**March—Irish/St. Paddy day (we'll try to get an Irish group in—or some concertina players).**

**April—"Taxing songs," hard songs, drinking songs, "no body knows the trouble I've seen songs." I'm not sure about this one, maybe it needs to be discussed a little more.**

**VAL:** Wow! You've really been working on this! Let me think about it. Also, we can see what other people have to say. And what about getting back to our "before meetings and during intermission" background players; that was always nice. What do you think?

**BOB:** Absolutely! I've said so many times.

**VAL:** Another thought is to announce at all meetings that those who want to join in a Jam Session are welcome to do so after the meeting—with a couple of players to lead it.

**BOB:** It sounds great to me! Now, it looks good for **Ladies Night**—I think we'll have a full program. What about it?

**VAL:** Did you know that the BAAC band plans to play that night too? We're working on a medley of two pieces about women: If You Were the Only Girl in the World and A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody. The Fun Band is counting on playing. Lee Woodall and her group would like to play if there's time. That means Lee, Jim Firpo, Vince Cirelli, and maybe Tony Di Bono.

**BOB:** Would you like me to e-mail Norma Parsons?

**VAL:** Yes, do talk to Norma and Jackie. Marjorie Konrad called and said she won't be able to play—she had surgery and is also expecting houseguests from Norway. She wants to play another time—her grandson, who studies with Ken Chambers will play in the future for us. Oh! **Renate Bixby will definitely play** button box for us Ladies Night & **Jane Tripi (on accordion) and her daughter (on violin & vocals) will perform, too.**

**BOB:** Also, a few members of ACE would like to play a quartet or quintet. Joe thinks that's an excellent idea.

**VAL:** If there's room on the program, I can play something on my button box.

**BOB:** We had a good turnout last meeting—75+. Maybe advance notices about who is playing make a difference.

**VAL:** Well, things look really sensational for Ladies Night.

## **Maestro Galla-Rini and the Start of AAA (The American Accordionists' Association)**

The Maestro writes: Dear Paul,

In 1938 I was approached by Sam C. Rowland who came to me in my studio in New York City to ask what I thought about the idea of establishing an accordion association. He had already established the American Drummers' Association. He mentioned that of all accordionists, I was the first one to be apprised of the idea. My reply was that I thought it would be timely and that it would be well received. Therefore, the American Accordionists' Association was established on March 9, 1938, being the first of all accordion associations. When the charter membership cards were issued and I received my card I noticed that it read "Membership #1."

So, I was the first one to be consulted about the creation of the first accordion association ever and I received the charter membership card #1.

I feel sincerely humble about this since the rest of the charter members consisted of the "Crème de la Crème" of the accordion profession.

I am grateful that my dear friend Charles Nunzio is still

with me as one of the remaining two charter members of the AAA. I trust that we will still be around for another number of years.

Sincerely, Anthony Galla-Rini, President Emeritus, ATG.

*[In a matter related to our January BAAC PAGE about Magnante's Carnegie concert in 1938 and the Mecca Brothers sensational playing of a duet version of Rhapsody in Blue, the Maestro notes.]*

"These are details I've kept in my mind for 63 years.

When the Mecca boys were invited to take part in Magnante's concert they approached me to prepare an accordion duet version of *Rhapsody* as one of their selections. I agreed. How did it turn out? After they finished playing the last note and left the stage the applause was so thunderous and prolonged, that they had to come back for an encore. They played Frosini's *Jolly Caballero*. In Vaudeville parlance this was described as "stopping the show." In other words, the next act couldn't go on until the audience got their encore. A minor detail: the Mecca Brothers paid me \$60 for the arrangement and I was doubly paid by their execution of it. My very best, Tony."

### **Kimric Smythe Benefit**

Hello BAAC members,

I am having a benefit event on Saturday, April 28th. The need for this fundraiser has been brought about because the Gallery and myself (we share the location) have been locked in a legal battle to get our lease honored. It has been a nearly impossible fight and has so far cost us \$1,600 in legal fees. We informed the property manager that we will take him to court if he doesn't resolve certain problems (fire code violations, no heat, etc.) The Manager's response was to give us an eviction notice. We've subsequently had to call the police—the master lease-holder (with whom we have had serious problems) thinks he can do whatever he likes (legal or not), because he believes we'll soon be gone.

We are throwing the benefit to raise a legal fee fund and any money received will go directly towards legal expenses only. The event will run from noon to midnight on the 28th. There will be food and drinks. If anyone in BAAC would like to play please let me know. Attendance costs and/or donations will be nominal. [See Kimric's ad on the back page of the newsletter for his address & phone number.]

### **Domenic Saso Writes**

My movie *Playing Mona Lisa* is coming out on video in stores all over the nation on April 17th (or thereabouts). I play the accordion in three scenes & over the Credits at the end.

### **@ BOAZ ACCORDIONS: May**

#### **Thurs., May 17th 7:30 PM—THE JAPONIZE ELEPHANTS**

A recent import to the Bay Area music scene, *The Japonize Elephants* bring you the best in gypsy-bluegrass & circus-hardcore madness. Instrumentation includes accordion, guitar, banjo, flute, saxophone, junk percussion, bass and vocals. The band has recorded two CDs: *Bob's Bacon Barn* and *La Fete du Cloune-Pirate*, which will be available for sale.

Admission: \$4.00 at the door. Refreshments.

## **Piano to Chromatic**

**By Elaine James, London**

*(from The Accordion Monthly News)*

As a recently converted piano to button player, I was asked many times at the Autumn Accordion Festival, "How did you cope with changing to buttons after 16 years on the piano accordion?" My answers was, "No problem; I only wished I had done it sooner."

As a very nervous player, I have found that the chromatic layout has helped, the playing area is smaller and easier to reach, and stretches and jumps are brought to a minimum.

It can take several months to become proficient with the button system, especially when playing from memory. Practice and determination will solve this. In my case, a teacher was helpful and also participation in groups and bands gave me extra experience.

It is vital at the beginning to have nothing to do with a piano accordion until the chromatic system is fixed in your mind. There will be no difficulty in going back onto a piano keyboard, but if played for too long you may find the buttons slightly foreign again; this could affect your concentration and confidence.

Whether to change to B or C system is arguable, but my teacher John Leslie who has taught both to virtuoso standard (Edward Hession and Giuseppe Vasco on C and Amanda Tyson and Andrew Purkiss on B) is now convinced that the hand position and fingering for the B system is best if starting from scratch.

I gave myself a year to feel confident with the chromatic, but by 6 months I was hooked and doing quite well. Now, 2 years later I refuse to go back to the piano keyboard (apart from playing bass accordion occasionally). So, anyone thinking of changing, but wanting reassurance, you can have a word with a teacher or anyone already playing chromatics—we're only too willing to explain the system.

Since changing to the B system I feel more confident, I feel much more relaxed playing for other people—I have even played onstage in a competition! Other accordionists I have met that have "done the change" all agree that they are pleased that they have done it. So, if you are thinking about changing, my advice is: go for it; it's fun.

# A Symphonic Seat For the Accordion

by Hilding Bergquist

On the part of many accordion enthusiasts there is some wishful thinking and dreaming that some day the accordion will occupy a "regular chair" in a standard symphony orchestra. In spite of the fact that Berlioz, the "father of the orchestra" many years ago regarded the concertina with enough favor to include a treatise on it in his *Art of Instrumentation* (as he probably would have done also with today's accordion) and in spite of the fact that both these instruments have had not a few excellent performers, the



fact still remains they have not made any inroads into the ranks of symphonies as yet (excepting on certain occasions) nor perhaps are they ever likely to. And the fault is not necessarily that the composers (who are often accused and complained about) won't write for, or don't know how to write for the instrument. Such complaints are irrelevant. For even if orchestral composers continue to score occasionally for particular accordion "effects" as

they have done in the past the accordionist's position will not be that of "a regular," unless it is roughly placed in the same category as the harp, organ, etc., when used in conjunction with the orchestra. The instrumentation of the "standard" symphony orchestra has remained fixed for a long, long time and it is primarily for this rigidity that the accordion is never likely to form a part of the instruments always at work in such an aggregation. And have we all not seen the same situation in modern dance orchestras? In the performance of concertos with orchestra, however, the accordion is on the same plane as the piano.

But we need not despair. Perhaps a more satisfactory substitute shall we say, can be had in the formation of more and more symphonic orchestras "of our own" consisting of accordions, concertinas, and bandoneons. Perhaps these instruments can even be used in conjunction with one another, as the tone of each is distinctly different. And also, in this media, we can see a vast field of opportunity for a discerning virtuoso-composer-accordionist to create entirely original works, rather than adapting those from the standard orchestral repertoire. In this way such a composer could give the works performed by the standard symphony orchestra a run for their money!

Original relative works for such a media may be a comparatively new idea in itself, although the formation of such accordion orchestras is not new. Concertina orchestras for instance (I use the words accordion, concertina, bandoneon interchangeably) date back several decades in England, Russia, and Germany, and the late Russian concertina virtuoso Raphael, considered as his prime achievement the formation in 1912 of a 45-piece concertina orchestra. And as recent as only some ten years ago in Germany, there flourished 45 entire bandoneon orchestras in Berlin alone! (Not to mention the accordion and concertina orchestras.)

Over twenty years ago in Russia, native instruments were being perfected in a special laboratory of the State Institute for Musical Science. The first instrument to be subjected to such investigation—and thus dignified—was the accordion, the most popular instrument bar none known to the workers and peasants. A standard type of accordion, allowing for the execution of complicated musical works of the masters, without any adaptation was thus created. The Soviet accordion sections attached to music polytechnic institutes and schools have helped too to further the general standard among musical circles. And the work among Russian accordionists at this time culminated in the organization of a series of accordion orchestras, actually coping with such works as Beethoven's Third Symphony, his Egmont and Grieg's Suites. Some years ago, just before the war, it has been stated, an attempt was made to bring one of these Russian accordion symphony orchestras over here to the U.S., but it never materialized. This aggregation of accordionists was said to play everything from Bach to Shostakovitch. Incidentally I remember with great pleasure the brilliant accordion art displayed in the Russian musical film *They Met in Moscow*. One of the leading actors in this film portrayed an accordionist.

Probably the two leading accordion orchestras in Germany today are those conducted by Rudolph Würthner and Alan Helm. Bandoneon orchestras have been in abundance, and two well-known bandoneon virtuosos are Walter Porschmann and Arthur Meriowsky. Some 10 years ago, when visiting England, Alan Helm's accordion orchestra recorded in London an original work composed by G. S. Mathis, entitled *Spring, Symphonic Impression* (Tone Poem), Parts 1 and 2, on *His Master's Voice* (H.M.V.) 664. The work is described as follows (and published by Hohner in London): "Written in the modern harmonic idiom, akin in parts to the music of Debussy and Stravinsky, it is the first attempt to provide the accordion with that type of serious symphonic music which, until now has been the prerogative of the standard symphony orchestra. One truly becomes lost for words at the graceful playing and the accordion tone seems to become almost perfect woodwinds and strings." While in London, this orchestra also performed a monumental composition by the Swedish organist-composer Diderick Buxtehude, forerunner and inspiration of Bach, but it was not recorded. A few such accordion orchestras have also existed here in the U.S. in various parts of the country during the last twenty years or so, but only very recently have they begun to achieve a more meritorious recognition and prominence. Perhaps an all-accordion modern dance orchestras could also be formed.

[This article is reprinted in its entirety from the July 1948 issue of *Accordion World* (New York) as archived by The Classical Free-Reed website. It was researched by Henry Duktorski with the assistance of Brian O'Boyle and Stanley Darrow through the resources of the American Accordion Musicological Society Library.]

# Frank Lima Faces the Music

By Steve Mobia

Wearing a transparent plastic mask and huge platform shoes, Frank Lima kept the tunes coming as the sole accompanist for the silent 1927 documentary *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*—at the Fine Arts Cinema in Berkeley for three nights, April 12th through 14th. Boaz Rubin of Boaz Accor-dions has worked out an interesting partnership with the managers of Berkeley's Fine Arts Cinema, one of the last Bay Area repertory film houses (and the last in the East Bay since the recent closing of the mammoth UC Theater). On three occasions, he's sponsored live accompaniment for classic silent films. Henri Ducharme provided accompa-niment to Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*; Max & Minka played along with Baum's *His Majesty the Scare-crow of Oz*, and now Frank Lima as "Morgani" has accom-panied Ruttman's vintage film about a day in the life of Berlin circa 1927. In exchange for his sponsorship, Rubin gets poster advertising for his shop and mention of his top of the line Bugari accordions, which are provided to the performers.



Always an impeccable dresser, Lima matched the black and red color scheme of his accordion by dressing in black with red gloves, headscarf and sash. Frank is a street performer in Santa Cruz and has attracted attention in outrageously imaginative ways. Whether he's appearing in drag or outfitting his accordions with Mylar or spandex, Frank Lima seems to have an inexhaustible source for ideas. You may have noticed him carrying a computer keyboard squeezebox last year at Cotati. I'm sure the locals wonder what Frank will look like the next time they see him on the street (I've never seen him dressed the same way twice). One might expect to hear something weird and otherworldly from such a performer instead of the toe-tapping standards he regularly plays. For this show he dropped the first name of his adopted pseudonym "Julio Morgani" and went by simply "Morgani" for dramatic effect.

Filmmaker Walter Ruttman, himself a musician, made rhythmic abstract shorts before *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* and his focus on composition and rhythm was very apparent in this documentary, which made much use of motion and direction. There were thousands of people in the film, often candidly shot and from all walks of life: young and old, rich and poor, a whole society. Quick cross-cutting and montage were frequently used, often for a humorous or sarcastic effect, such as cattle being intercut with people walking to work; or shop window displays commenting on the street action. Beginning with a morning train arrival and

ending with a fireworks display at night this was a non-narrative portrait of urban life. The film's fascination with machinery and vehicles bordered on the obsessive with a lot of footage devoted to trains, streetcars and automobiles. This was a period near the end of the Weimar Republic and the glorious bustle of Berlin depicted in the movie would soon be drastically changed with the coming of the Great Depression. Contrasting with Henri Ducharme's serious and

poetic interpretation of a similar film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, Morgani with his accompaniment aimed for lightweight entertainment. His tunes were chosen mostly for comic value, often wryly commenting on the screen action: examples include *Zippity Do Da*, as people go to their jobs; *Falling in Love Again* during a street fight; *People (Who Need People)* during an inflammatory soap box speech and the TV theme from *Mister Ed* during a sequence involving horses. Lima said he had to restrain himself from using vocal sound effects, because that

might have offended film purists. A device he used several times was starting a melody in a major key, then shifting into the minor mode when the film action got darker. This had a bizarre effect in the case of *It's a Small World*, the insidious Disneyland melody, which developed an ominous quality when played in the minor key. Other themes basically supported the screen action such as: *Putting on the Ritz* and *Cabaret* during nightclub activity; *Singing in the Rain* during a brief downpour; *Hurray for Hollywood* for a stage review and *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* during some airborne shots. Recognizing the song was essential to fully appreciate the irony and humor of his choices; therefore, selections were usually from well-known popular sources along with a liberal sprinkling of favorite Nino Rota themes. His timing was quite impressive with segues between the tunes well handled and (on occasion) timed flourishes, such as when a wild-eyed person jumps from a bridge into a canal (apparently a suicide) and temporarily distracts those nearby.

The playing style was energetic and the arrangements full. Lima claims not to read sheet music and his arrangements are done entirely by ear. However, perhaps because his accordion wasn't amplified during the show, he tended to play everything loud and with master switch settings. This listener would have preferred more contrast and variety. All in all though, the performance by the mysterious *Morgani* made for a diverting evening.



# Should Accordionists Play Bach?

By William Palmer (1917-1996)

There seems to be a definitely established school of thought to the effect that Accordionists should leave the music of Bach and the other great masters strictly alone. This is not surprising. I am reminded of the school that insists that Bach's so-called "piano works" should be played only on the clavichord, since they were originally written for that instrument and do not sound as intended when played on the piano. It is fortunate that this idea is not accepted by many, or piano students and artists would be robbed of a vast amount of important literature, and a valuable part of their training.

Certainly it is true that there are many compositions that we had best not attempt. This is largely because of the limitations of the bass keyboard. It certainly does not mean that we must leave *all* of Bach's works alone, even with the standard accordion as it now exists. The *Toccat*



*in D Minor* has become standard accordion repertoire. It is very well adapted to our instrument, and has been heard on the programs of Gallarini, Magnante, Matusewitch, and many other outstanding artists. I have used this selection in at least fifty concerts, together with other

compositions of Bach. I have never received adverse criticism on any of Bach's works, even from the most serious critics and many of them have expressed surprise at how well these numbers can be adapted to the accordion.

The foremost concert pianists often use transcriptions of Bach's organ works on their programs, in spite of the wealth of great music already at their disposal. Such music is better adapted for the accordion, which is, after all, a member of the organ family. Even the *Fugue in D Minor* that follows the famous *Toccat* is not impossible and can actually be more accurately transcribed for standard accordion than for piano. I will even be so bold as to say that the accordion can give many of Bach's compositions a touch of expressive fire that the organ cannot equal.

On a recent concert tour Arthur Rubenstein played the well known *Chaconne* from Bach's Sonata No. 6 for unaccompanied violin. I am sure the accordion can approach the tone of the violin as closely as a piano can. This number was very effective as a piano solo, and received the plaudits of critics. It would also make an effective accordion solo, I am sure.

There is a wealth of material here for our use. Not all of it is "heavy" or serious. There are light rondos, themes with variations, gavottes, bourees, etc. Bach wrote for every conceivable instrument of his day. He transcribed his own vocal works for organ, his organ works for string quartets, and even made a flute solo out of one of them. I cannot believe that the Old Master would have objected to accordion arrangements of some of his works.

At the Milwaukee State Teacher's College in 1947 I played two rather light compositions of Bach. The director of the music department liked these so well that he asked me to repeat them at a class of his music majors, and to comment on the possibilities of the modern piano accordion. He remarked at the time that he would like for me to play these selections at the high schools of the city to "prove to the students," as he expressed it, "that Bach is easy to listen to."

I am tempted to believe that the accordionist who shuns Bach is either not well acquainted with this music or does not appreciate the true possibilities of his instrument. In my recent article for *Accordion World*, "An Open Letter to Accordion Manufacturers," I stated the need for a more adequate bass keyboard. If we can only add two octaves of usable, continuous range to the left hand, in addition to the present set-up, practically all of Bach's organ works will then be possible. This may mean the addition of more bass buttons, but will not necessarily mean the end of the standard 120 bass accordion. It might mean that an accordionist who has learned to play well on the 120 bass would then graduate to a still larger instrument, perhaps with 160 basses. Those who are still content to play oom-pah do not have to do this, of course. In any event the 120 bass accordion, one of the finest foundation instruments in existence, would still provide the foundation for all accordionists.

No, I do not believe that *all* accordionists should attempt to play Bach. The *ambitious* student can improve himself a great deal in every respect by studying the works of this musical giant. No man has a right to dampen the enthusiasm of such a student or to stand in the way of the progress of the accordion because of his own lack of ambition or imagination.

[Henry Doktorski: "This article was reprinted in its entirety from the April 1949 issue of *Accordion World* (New York). The free-bass accordion which Dr. Palmer desired had already been invented in Europe (chromatic free-bass system), but had not yet become popular in the United States. Paul Hindemith included a part for free-bass accordion in his *Kammermusik No. 1* (1922) as did Alban Berg in his opera *Wozzeck* (1922). According to Hohner Music Publishers, the first solo piece written for the accordion with the free-bass left-hand manual was *Paganiniana* (1952), a virtuosic set of eighteen etudes on a theme by Niccolò Paganini by the German composer Hans Brehme (1904-1957). Mogens Ellegaard, the "father of the avant-garde accordion movement," discovered the free-bass accordion in 1953. Palmer himself invented a free-bass accordion (quint system) around the same time which was later patented by the Titano Accordion Company. The chromatic system became popular in Europe and Russia while the quint system became popular in America, New Zealand and Italy." The great bayanists, Vyacheslav Semyonov, Friedrich Lips, Christine Rossi and others have recorded Bach's *Chaconne*, we heard Øivind Farnem perform *The Goldberg Variations* which was also recorded by him, and numerous accordionists have performed and recorded Bach beautifully in the intervening years.]

## Peter Soave on Accordion Life & the Life of the Accordion

[The following interview with Peter Soave was conducted by Thomas Fabinski for The Classical Free Reed website on September 1, 1999. The following is a transcription of a spontaneous, off the cuff conversation. I think it is one of the best items I've read about the many aspects of our instrument and performing, which is why I've reproduced it here in spite of its length.]

**TOM FABINSKI:** When I arrived, Peter was attending to some last minute travel arrangements. I had a chance to note the CDs on his mantel. They ranged from Art Tatum's *Complete Piano Solo Masterpieces*, Astor Piazzolla's *1974-1983 Collection*, Herbert Von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic's *Beethoven's 9 Symphonies*, Sinatra's *His Life and Times* to a collection of Sviatoslav Richter piano recordings.

**You recently performed in a concert with the Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras) at Tiger Stadium to benefit the Michigan Opera Theater. It must have been a thrilling experience to perform in front of such a large crowd with them. Please tell us about the concert. Were the Tenors familiar with the expressive capabilities of the bayan?**

Soave: Well, I was definitely honored and excited. Artistically it was a tremendous artistic happening working with James Levine. I was convinced that he must be, if not the greatest, one of the few great conductors. As far as the singers, we don't need to talk about how great they are. And even though Pavarotti was sick and he had been cancelling prior to this concert, he was really pressured not to cancel this concert. He cancelled a recital, I forget where, but it made headlines two weeks prior to that. And he just couldn't knock this bug he had. So, he was cracking on the high notes but it's really immaterial because of the grandeur of Pavarotti. And then, of course, there was Domingo and Carreras, without saying this one's better than the other one. It was just an emotional, incredible high, a musical high, and cultural high to witness that, to be accompanying them. You can't describe the feeling.

In this case, it was 101 hand-picked orchestra members from a core base of the Michigan Opera and a lot of other hand-picked players from around the area. For example, the pianist was flown in from the MOT (Metropolitan Opera Theater). And a few other key players like myself were brought in for this.

Financially, you would think that such a high profile engagement would be very rewarding, but it wasn't. Which is immaterial but it is a point of interest. By the time they withdraw this tax and that tax and then you had to join the union. I've never been a member of the union. Whenever I've played with symphonies before, I've never had to join. But in this situation, a lot of the extras that were brought in were forced to join.

So there was a lot of business to it and we wonder, where does all the money go? I know a lot of it's fund-raising but you hear all sorts of things—the Three Tenors all shared a million dollars each or this or that. They definitely didn't do it for free. But the orchestra member's base pay was very, very small. (Laughter) So that was funny. Musically though it was a great moment in my life.

**Were the Three Tenors familiar with the bayan? Had they heard it performed? Did they realize it was so expressive?**

Soave: Well now we go into another interesting point. The rehearsal started. We had a total of seven engagements between the rehearsal, dress rehearsals and the concert. So, I've never been in such a well-rehearsed professional unit. You probably don't have that luxury as a musician unless you are working with one or all 3 of the tenors. It's just too costly. When I

performed with leading international orchestras, it's usually 2 rehearsals. When I played with Neeme Jarvi and the Detroit Symphony it was one rehearsal that lasted 12 minutes and then it was concert time. And my selection's duration was about 15 minutes. And that's Neeme Jarvi and the Detroit Symphony and he's regarded as one of the great conductors in the world today. So, early on in the rehearsals the accordion part is very small, very small. James Levine told us that he had already done 17 of these Three Tenor Concerts. They've done a few others without him, but he's assisted in 17, including Japan and most recently in South Africa. Zubin Mehta did the first one in Rome back in the early 90's.

So, he really set us up because the tenors did not come until the end of the week, naturally. He told us Luciano's going to respond this way. Carreras is going to respond this way.

Some of the rehearsals, the pieces for accordion were not even touched so literally we just sat there for 3 ½ hours along with some of the other added musicians such as featured guitarists and electric bass. So I would say about 2 or 3 of the rehearsals was just a matter of us sitting there. And you do not know what the rehearsal schedule is. You just sit and get paid to sit there and go home and come back at night to rehearse again. You might not be on. I guess it's kind of similar to percussionists in an orchestra. Sometimes you sit out for three movements which last for 50 minutes and all of a sudden you're on at the end.

**The toughest part is keeping your attention.**

Soave: Exactly. And looking like you're into it. So, going back to the response to the accordion, the bayan. Most of the orchestra parts are from a Henry Mancini book. Mancini did arrangements for Pavarotti a few decades ago. And they're usually in Neapolitan songs like *Mama, Non Ti Scordar Di Me* (Don't Forget Me), *Roman Guitar (Chitarra Romano)*. Those are Mancini arrangements with the accordion in there for embellishment. A lot of times they'll have an accordion introduction, or an accordion lead-in or a riff here and there, at the bridge, or at the turn-around. They're very tasty but they're very small accordion parts. Typically when Pavarotti has performed recitals, concerts, orchestral recitals throughout the world, different accordionists have been called in to perform. If he's in LA, usually Frank Marocco has accompanied him or recorded it with him. In New York I know one time Bill Schimmel did a Pavarotti concert in Central Park. And then last year they did the big concert, the 3 of them, at the Eiffel Tower, and they had a very good accordionist, a young French accordionist who played the part. Several years ago when Pavarotti came to Detroit, at the Joe Louis arena, I was engaged to accompany him.

There are usually encores, about 4 or 5 pieces. The conductors and Pavarotti are familiar with the accordion in terms of that sort of embellishment role. Now since the 3 tenors have become the main show, more so than even Pavarotti alone, Lalo Schifrin got involved with the arranging. So, the other set of pieces are either re-arranged by Lalo Schifrin with the accordion or they're just new medleys with the accordion in them penned by Lalo Schifrin.

Now, ironically you have doubled-up instruments in the orchestra. There were 101 musicians. You have, without getting

technical, a bunch of 1st violins, a bunch of 2nd violins, violas, cellos, flutes, you've got horns, you have contrabass, (upright bass), but there's only one accordion. If we were to do this musically correct, there should be, I would say with 101 musicians on stage, 35,000 people in the audience, you should have at least 3 to 5 accordions. But it's kind of foolish just to put 1 accordion in there. It should be a section. So that's just unfortunate because a lot of money is spent in producing these shows but then they do want to save money and with the accordion they only hire one. And it's just not enough.

Leading to our first problem. At my first rehearsal when I had one of my key lead-ins, the Maestro stopped the orchestra and said, "Could we have a little more accordion?" Well, there's only so much you can pull. I tried it again. I tried to pull louder but at that point you end up becoming a little unmusical, and you're just yanking on it. And you go beyond a fortissimo, and it's supposed to be a melodic lead-in. So, he wasn't too pleased with it and I wasn't either. But there's nothing you can do. Time is money. They went forward and that was that.

And that was with my bayan, my Mythos bayan which is a pretty well recognized instrument, one of only a few that Pignini built with hand-made Russian reeds by Vasiliev, regarded as one of the leading modern day concert bayans in the world, which I'm very proud to own. It just couldn't cut it. Well, naturally that instrument is not made to entertain 35,000 people, or even 5,000. The bayan is basically built to replicate an organ, in a very acoustical room like a church or cathedral or for a small chamber setting in a small room.

Next day, I brought a musette accordion with heavy musette. And after my lead-in, again he stopped! Not much discussion now, mind you, because things are happening very quickly. You don't have time to talk. There are a bunch of people in the wings, production people, management, I don't know who they all are. And 101 musicians on the floor, in position and then the almighty James Levine conducting. And I don't mean that sarcastically. He's really incredible! Every movement, every motion from his body exudes music, a musical response by his soldiers.

So it was pretty much the same scenario, "Could we have a little more accordion?" He really didn't even notice the difference or, I'm sure he noticed, but it was not on his mind, he was just looking for something different. And even though they're totally contrasting instruments, from a dry-tuned, nearly perfect concert accordion/bayan to a real heavy wet-tuned musette. It didn't work. We went on.

The next time, maybe day three or day four, I brought another different version, differently tuned, but again wet-tuned accordion. Pretty much the same thing happened. He didn't say "Oh, they're getting better." As far as my feeling was, he didn't even know I was doing anything different. (Laughter) It just wasn't what he wanted. But I had the feeling like he's never been happy with it.

You often wonder, what are these writers thinking of? Lalo Schifrin is an incredible film writer but a lot of times you wonder, did he really write this or was he really afraid to write for the accordion because a lot of times the writing is not very accordionistic. The composers want the accordion for flavoring but they don't spend a lot of time writing for the accordion because the skill level of accordionists is not reliable and consequently the composers haven't been exposed to the musical capabilities of the accordion.

So, sometimes other composers are called in to score the extra parts because they're just too busy to do all of it. And so they just put their name on the top and they get the royalties and a lot of times that is done. But I don't know whether that was the case on these particular medleys that I performed with the 3 tenors at Tiger Stadium.

Now, the last day I took a risk. A few people suggested, including Frank Marocco & told me, "You should do it on bandoneon. I'm sure nobody's ever done it on bandoneon and, heck at least you'll stand out because they play with all kind of accordion players, all over the world. You'll probably stand out with that. You'll have a better chance of being noticed." I said "Yeah, but it's not an accordion!" "Aw, they don't care. It's very musical. Try it!" So, I took a risk. I was very nervous, but I brought it.

And I guess it's a good thing I wasn't in the front. So, like I had mentioned earlier, I'm not even sure if James Levine noticed that I was bringing a different accordion because he wasn't looking whether they were white or black or whether they were small or whether they were large. But, naturally my surrounding musicians, they noticed when I came in with a little concertina on my knee rather than a big monster!

And they were saying, "Wow, what's that?!" And when they saw how far you expand the bellows they were kind of surprised. We did a run through. He didn't say anything at all which left me in even greater confusion. (Laughter) I didn't know what to do. Concert time is approaching. I think it was the next day or so. So, I didn't know what to do.

The last thing you want to do is show up for a concert with whatever instrument they don't like and they tell you then, "Oh I don't like this one." "Well, geez, I used it in the rehearsal?!" "No, no, no, I don't like it."

So, I got a hold of James Levine after lunch. We had lunch, all the orchestra members, together. And, I asked him, "Maestro, I'm the accordionist." He said, "Yes, yes, it's coming along today! Today, it sounded a lot better!" I said, "Well you know, I brought the bandoneon today. And, the other days, I used different types of accordions." He said, "Yes, yes, the accordion today cut through." And so, I wasn't sure. He must know what a bandoneon is and I asked him, "Are you familiar with the bandoneon?" "Oh, yes, I love Piazzolla's music? It's great! The accordion you played today is very good. Yeah! Just play nice and strong, the one you played today cut through more. It had a little more character!" (Laughter) I said, "OK." (Laughter) So, that's where we're at. (Laughter)

### **So, you did use the bandoneon in the performance?**

Soave: And nobody complained. You did your job. Everyone's happy. We're all professionals. It was very nice! It was very nice—it was a beautiful feeling. I mean mentioning that money thing is just funny, because let's be realistic. If you're a musician in backwoods cultural America and you're a full time artist, there's not too many venues where you can make a living. I make my living performing everywhere but Detroit. I play once or twice a year in Detroit. Ironically, when I was looking to perform more, I couldn't get legitimate engagements.

Now this year, I'm booked with the Grosse Pointe symphony, and they approached me. Whereas, 15 years ago, and I was trying to approach them, I couldn't get anywhere. I'm playing with the Plymouth Symphony as featured artist. I played with them before and received all sorts of accolades by the conductor. But whenever I would talk about him engaging me as featured artist one or two years in the future, he always had some sort of difficulty. He would always say on the same hand "Boy, it's been such a pleasure working with you." He always had some sort of either financial difficulties or the program's already set up or this or that. So, I was, kind of down because there's not too much work here.

Now ironically, this year orchestras like that, they're calling me and I do have some engagements, though definitely not enough to live off just working here in the Detroit area. There's not much going on here if you are a very skilled soloist. But when you work with the Detroit Symphony—that's where I'm leading to—

when you work with the Detroit Symphony, the starting pay is like \$82,000 or give or take 5 or 6 thousand. You know it's in that neighborhood. Plus, a lot of them, a great majority, are on faculties of more than one college. They're at Oakland University and at Wayne State University. Most of them are at Wayne State (to which I've just been appointed recently for bayan/bandoneon—I have one student). And they're at Ann Arbor (U of M) and at Eastern Michigan University. So being in the symphony or on a college faculty is the only real legitimate gig as far as a concert-trained musician goes. Everyone else has left Detroit. So there really aren't that many venues to perform.

**Are there other accordionists in this country that are doing something similar to what you're doing?**

Soave: Well granted that in the past there were an abundance of active outstanding accordionists. There were a lot of outstanding accordionists that maybe were active at one time and, not to say that they're old now, it's just that they're out of it and they couldn't keep it going. You get older, you have a family to raise, bills to pay and where are you going to perform? And you think when you do a lot of legitimate engagements like the Three Tenors, which of course, doesn't happen that often, but for the accordionists that are eligible to do an engagement like that, it doesn't pay, you can make more money working in restaurants. I actually have three protégés living with me. One is on a talent scholarship at Wayne State University. He's a sophomore this year. He's from France. Another one who's 19 is more into jazz. He's free-lancing around town and in a week's time he can make more money than I did working with the 3 tenors. This is the whole thing that's getting me. But, it's funny because this 3 tenor thing was next to nothing financially. So it's a big business racket, where they can sell tickets at \$7,500 and cheap tickets for a few hundred! (Laughter) And bleacher tickets for \$50!

**So you mentioned that you played Mama and what else?**

*Under Paris Skies* and there were medleys with little intrusions here and there.

**Have you been performing the Piazzolla bandoneon concertos?**

Soave: Yes, I just recorded with the Moscow Philharmonic in July 1999 in Pula, Croatia in the Arena, on the Adriatic, right across from Venice.

**Is that recording available?**

Soave: I haven't heard it, so, I would assume that it will be out next year but I don't know the details on it. And I'm playing the concerto with the Napa Valley Symphony in February, 2000.

**So, your phone just rang one day, I assume Maestro Levine didn't ask you to perform?**

Soave: No, usually each orchestra has a booking manager and they get a list of the programs with instrumentation. So any miscellaneous instrumentation they look at it and they hire you from there.

**You've kind of answered this question a little bit, but do you feel your opportunities to concertize are growing in this country? You are obviously making trips overseas. Do you see this country catching up with the popularity that the bayan has in Europe?**

Soave: The funny thing is that it's not the bayan and it's happening all over the world simultaneously. It's the bandoneon. And it's great thanks to Astor Piazzolla. He's 99% responsible for this. You see, this whole thing started back with the Tango Project which was recorded in the early 80's on Nonesuch records and which Bill Schimmel was part of. And it was so successful. At the time the accordion was so taboo, and yet it became so successful, so chic, so in vogue, with classical audiences that don't generally

like the accordion.

Mort Herold (from Chicago) said a very interesting thing. I'll never forget this. He published an article in *The Golden Age of the Accordion* and his wrap-up was basically that people who like accordion music generally don't listen to symphonic music and, on the other hand, people who sponsor the arts, and follow and support symphony orchestras, don't like the accordion. (Laughter) In most cases, they will not even tolerate it! This project that Bill Schimmel did, it was the starting point, and all of a sudden it just took off. I mean, it took time and it's still growing, it's still mounting. This is a wave, a crescendo that's still going.

And, the tango music and Piazzolla, they all just started, just unfolded every year more and more and more. Finally to the point where when Piazzolla died, his death really pushed it up a few notches. And it's just continual.

We're at the point today where the greatest superstars in the world, the real money guys, like Yo-Yo Ma, who only makes \$60-70,000 a night (and I know that for a fact—his management told me) 60-70 grand a night for a concert! He's transcribing bandoneon music for the cello! Everything that the concert accordionist was no-no'ed for all these years—"Oh, you don't have a legitimate instrument, and, oh you have pre-fixed chords on the left hand! Oh, it's a silly instrument, oh it's too loud, oh, it's for beer halls, it can't play classical music, you can't play serious music on it." All these no-no's.

All of a sudden, thanks to Piazzolla, having been such the innovator that he was, and so multi-faceted, through his instrument and his compositions [we have this tremendous push]. He not only made his impact through his compositions, but his playing itself moved the same people to the same degree.

Now we have Yo-Yo Ma winning a Grammy transcribing bandoneon music, concertina music, on his cello—his Stradivarius cello! This is our lesson! This is the wake-up call! The accordion, as brilliant as it is, and I talked just in passing there about my Mythos, which is very, very well-known. It's not just because it's mine. Usually I'm a very critical person and I could tell you many things that I don't like about it because it's just not perfect enough. But it is regarded as one of the best modern concert accordions. Mechanically it's second to none.

And service-wise, I've had the great fortune of working with the Pignini family for numerous years. And I'm in Europe so often that it's always serviced. It's like buying a car out of the Rouge plant and William Clay Ford personally arranges for you to have your oil changed by the people who make the car. (Laughter) You just pull right into the factory and we will do your oil changes and rotate your tires every 500 miles! It's just an indescribable luxury situation I've had with the Pignini family. So I have an incredible instrument.

But what do we have there? We have an instrument that is at most, copying other instruments. Either we're trying to simulate an organ, a harpsichord (classically speaking) with registrations trying to sound like a flute or a clarinet or bassoon or even a bandoneon! (Laughter) And today I can see it. Years ago, I don't think many people really looked at it. But today, it's all beginning to come around to "Where is the real sound of the accordion?"

And the real sound of the accordion is the musette for the Neapolitan sound, the Bavarian sounds, Slovenian sound, different degrees of de-tuning, or tremolo or whatever we want to call it. Everyone calls it something different, the Hohner sound or the Parisian sound. Everyone wants a different type of tuning on their ethnic boxes. But the musette is the accordion sound.

Now when we try to make that sound sophisticated, make it dry, you've lost an incredible amount of character. Then, yes you're going to have to try to sound like an organ, but an organ is superior. There is no way we can compete with an organ. And the idea that we have two manuals propelled by one bellows is like putting the voices of Pavarotti and Placido in the same

mouth propelled by the same lung! You can't differentiate.

The accordion is still seeking its identity in classical music. The bandoneon isn't. So the accordion has taken the direction of the bayan, its most recent development. And the instrument I have, we can say it's at the top of that.

***Its development is maxxed out?***

Soave: Pretty much, I mean what are we gonna do? Add more registers, add a few more reeds, make it heavier and eat up more sound?

***One of the things I always wondered about is why they couldn't introduce some controllable vibrato like the harmonica has, where he can take it from straight tuned to something else—like a cellist can.***

Soave: You can. The problem is what would happen? First of all, how many hundreds of reeds do we have in a concert accordion? It's absurd!

Take a violin, how many strings are on a violin? But look at its playing range—it's enormous. The industry needs to standardize the accordion, to really come down and focus. What do we want to give to the composer so that he will write for the instrument? Because up to now, composers only treated it as a novelty, just like I'm talking here about Mancini and Lalo Schifrin. They did not treat the accordion seriously in their writing.

I've worked with many new composers in the past 15-20 years and there's one similarity—they're all overwhelmed by my concert instrument. It's an eye-opening experience. "Wow, I didn't know such a versatile instrument exists! Wow, it's incredible what you can do with it!"

But then when it comes time to write for it, they really don't know which direction to go in! Either they write for it the same way as a piano or an organ or they have to go totally modern and just use it for effects. Gubaidulina being a great success with that. But that's not music that the public is going listen to on a large scale.

***So do I sense what you're suggesting is that they take out some of the reed blocks and introduce the ability to control the vibrato more?***

Soave: Absolutely! We don't have a soundboard in the accordion. We have tons of mechanisms. The goal of the manufacturer—well, the poor manufacturer is only building what people tell him to build. That's been the role of the manufacturer and distributor all along. They're just selling what their dealers want to buy and sell to their schools (when there were schools!). Today there are very few schools that teach accordion on any scale.

The instrument should be eliminated of its excess. We have too much range, too many notes and too many reeds. There's no resonance in the box. The instruments are so heavy because they have to be heavy to hold the mechanism. Could you imagine using the thickness of wood in an accordion in a cello! You wouldn't have a sound! Or a violin! Those are delicate instruments. Accordions are not delicate. Yeah, the surface stuff is delicate. The ornamental stuff. But that wood is so heavy. It's so thick.

And of course, there are so-called certain "secrets" that the different manufacturers have in terms of which woods they select. But let's be serious. The main thing with selecting wood for accordions is that it will hold its form. You don't want it to warp. So, it has to hold that crazy mechanism with all the rods, pistons, and everything.

And the reeds, those poor reeds are just sitting in beeswax in an over-crowded cabin, chamber or whatever you want to call it. There's not much room there. The sound is inside and it's not coming out. It's a small sound.

Musette tuning carries through better but that's a factory

made vibrato. But a dry-tuned accordion doesn't cut through. Beautiful as it is, it's good for a small room but not good for concert music on a whole.

When you heard me that time [in 1998] when I performed a concert with the Dearborn Civic Orchestra, I had a microphone but I was very frustrated. I've been playing with orchestras the past 15-20 years, different levels of orchestras, from very good to very poor. That was a medium orchestra. I wasn't disappointed with the level of the orchestra but disappointed with the lack of presence my instrument had. I had to have a microphone and I never felt like I was on top of the orchestra.

***That wasn't a particularly resonant or acoustical performance hall either; it was similar to a gymnasium with tiled floor and high ceilings and so it just ate up the sound. Even with a microphone you couldn't get on top of the orchestra.***

Soave: No. But there's no resonance in an accordion. With the accordion we've always had to rely on multiple notes, big chords, as opposed to single lines that a violin or singer would provide.

***I think with the stringed instruments, their design has been pretty well standardized over the past 200 years. I think the accordion, the bayan are relatively new instruments.***

Soave: And they're still searching.

***And you're pointing to the direction they need to go in the next few years.***

Soave: I don't have the answers. I just know that there's a problem and they're searching for it all over the world. I'm in Europe usually once a month—either performing, giving master classes or judging festivals.

Technically the level has progressed in terms of playing. The level has really jumped forward. Kids now are coming from the former Yugoslavia, from Spain, from Portugal, from not only the obvious countries, such as Russia. Actually the Russians have fallen behind, aside from the few stand-outs like Lips and Semyonov. In the 70's and 80's, the Russians were the greatest accordion players on a concert level. Now it has definitely spread all around the world.

The problem is what do you do after you win competitions? You're 19 years old. You've been studying for whatever, 10, 12 years or more. You're gifted. You've won a lot of awards. Everyone tells you you're great. Where can you work now? All you can do is teach someone else to get to the same point and have the same problem (Laughter).

***I don't have the answer to that.***

Soave: Right and they don't have the answer in Europe either. The bandoneon isn't going to automatically just give someone a career. But due to the construction, there is a lot more resonance and character in the sound. You're never trying to sound like another instrument. And you're not trying to play everyone else's music. You can make adaptations. You can play some baroque music beautifully. There's no reason why you shouldn't. But it excels at its music, which started with the Tango.

So now we can be the devil's advocate and say, "Well, what are we going to do, are you just going to play tango music the rest of your life? The bandoneon's only good for tango. You just said it's only good for Piazzolla's music." No, it's inspiring other composers from South America now. And also American composers are looking at it. Little by little. And it's expanding. It's not going to fight with the accordion because we don't have that many people playing either instrument. (Laughter)

There just aren't that many career accordionists or bandoneonists out there. The numbers are small. Which system is better? I think the two instruments complement each other. I think

a classical minded youngster should have a complete education, which you can have on a bayan type instrument and that's what they're doing in Europe. And as they're getting older though, they're bringing in the bandoneon to work with other instruments.

**So you see yourself performing on both the bayan and the bandoneon?**

Soave: Yes, less bayan. We made that darn accordion so compact, with so many notes on it, and such a great mechanism where you can go from free-bass to standard bass and so many different registration possibilities and chin registers and man, they did everything but put a motor in it! But it just automatically cut itself off from the rest of the musical world. You do have the real one-man band.

With the bayan you can do everything. You can play a Bach 5-voice fugue, play all the notes, as written. You can't even do that on a piano which is the greatest instrument in the world, in terms of grandeur. Composers write from the piano, they're not going to write from the violin or an accordion. I don't care which accordion it is. It's not a matter of exposing it. You can write from the piano. Everything is there. It's perfect to write from.

The accordion at its current development has sectioned itself off from groups, from group playing with building bigger reeds for the basses, this kind of sound for the chords and this and that, and oh! The bandoneon, alone it's nothing. You have to have accompaniment. It's like a voice. Pavarotti could never go out and perform in front of 35,000 people without an orchestra behind him. He needs an orchestra! A violinist also. You need accompaniment with a bandoneon. Accordion, no, it can play alone.

And, of course, you can play it with other instruments, but when you play with other instruments, when you have musette tuning in it which makes you totally folk sounding, totally Parisian sounding, you're kind of limited. Bandoneon, through Tango, which is a very free form, it's not just La Cumparsita. The Tango is incorporating modernism through Tango Nuevo and Piazzolla, modernism and a lot of Romanticism as well as folkism and Pop. It's a music that the public can respond to fairly comfortably without being intimidated—oh that, it's Polkas or it's Waltzes.

Let's face it, we never had a Lawrence Welk of the Tango in America as much as I respect Lawrence Welk. And I was inspired to play the accordion through Lawrence Welk. But on the same hand, it turned a great mass of people away from the accordion because he was fighting the Beatles. And you saw who won. (Laughter)

**So you just have the one student at Wayne State? Is this like an elected course or independent study?**

Soave: No, he's won a full talent scholarship for bayan performance, and we just opened the bandoneon department. I'm a faculty adjunct. Obviously, I'm not going to be holding an office for one or two students. But it was just made official back in June. So starting with this semester, he'll be going through a regular program and the instrument is bandoneon, lets say 60% bandoneon and 40% bayan. And so his recitals will reflect that. He's already automatically, in performance. I'll be helping him form a quartet with bandoneon, piano, violin and bass.

I went to Wayne years ago but I never graduated from there because it was a very difficult setting for me. I was young and I had won all sorts of competitions and done a lot of things that were considered impossible at the time. Like beating the Russians in world competition or learning the bayan. People told me I would have to go and study in Russia to do that. And that I was too old. I was already 16 at the time. But I did that all here in the Metro Detroit area and ended up accomplishing a lot with my talent. Going to Wayne was very, very, very discouraging because there really wasn't a place for me.

My instrument was all alone. I wanted to play with other

instruments but everything I was brought up on was with me being a soloist. And it was wham, bam, here let me play this big sonata for you. Here let me play this big organ fugue for you. Here let me play this for you. And of course I'd love to play the concerto for you but I couldn't get booked with an orchestra. (Laughter) It was just not the style to book accordion players, regardless of what you want, because it's just not in the circle. But thanks to Piazzolla, it's really opening opportunity in serious circles.

**Are recordings of the Three Tenor concert available?**

Soave: No, again, business wise they had some deal worked out with the Internet and it was broadcast live on the Internet and that was it. They sold the rights to NPR. NPR did it live on the Internet and it was only audio.

**Do you have any plans for future recordings? Can you tell our readers when the next release date that they could start to look forward to?**

Soave: I have a new recording called *Tango Moods* that just came out. I recorded it in Zagreb with a string quartet that I formed there. It's doing very well in Eastern Europe.

In Europe the reviews have been great. We performed a concert in Zagreb which is the capital of Croatia, at the end of July. It was a part of the Zagreb music festival, at which last year Zubin Mehta and the Israeli Philharmonic were the headliners. Our concert was sold out, standing room only and the three newspapers reviewed it. They all gave it unprecedented great reviews. They said, "This is the new group!" Myself and the string quartet. So we recorded, the CD is out.

I'm working right now with arrangers to go beyond Piazzolla. We have to look at why Piazzolla is so successful? Not just because he's Argentine or because his name sounds like pizza or it sounds exotic, or because he played the bandoneon. It's because all the ingredients were there. He was such a superior, focused player. He never sold himself short. He went all the way to the top for his goal. He achieved it. He died a little too young. But he never deviated.

And the hallmarks of his performance were outstanding control of his instrument, an instrument with tremendous expression! And a music that is so expressive, so expressive! And he did it from a tango base. But he was influenced by modern composers, as well as Bach, and Mozart, and Pachelbel. I hear a lot of Pachelbel in his music too. And impressionistic composers. As well as tango. And jazz. Why can't we do that with Gershwin, why can't we do that with Duke Ellington? That's what I'm doing right now.

**With a different base?**

Soave: Yeah, forget about the Tango beat, because even Piazzolla's music was not—dah, dah, dah, dah-dah, dah—I mean it's never that. It's a little jazzy at times, but it doesn't swing. It swings in a classical sense. And that's what needs to be done, I think for the accordion to stay alive and, by accordion, I'm not sure what the heck it is. I'm not sure if it's a bayan, if it's an accordion or bandoneon, or just a bellowed instrument treated seriously.

So I'm working with some very good and expensive arrangers to make a book for me. Because in the end, if we look back at the history of the accordion and its success, commercially and artistically, the most successful accordionists in our country, and even Europe have come from a unit, from a group, never one accordionist.

OK, Magnante was perhaps the greatest accordionist because he could do everything but he was the greatest among accordionists. The public at large did not know who Magnante was. After he got off the radio, nobody knew who Magnante was. Only accordionists knew, and still today, 90 year old accordionists say, "Oh, Charlie was the greatest!" I'm sure he was! I love his

music! But he was an accordion product. Even though he worked with Toscanini and he worked with all kinds of great players. He was an accordion product. He worked with Excelsior. He worked with the publishers. And he lived off the accordion industry at large. Same with Frosini. Same with Pietro Deiro. Galla-Rini was a little different. But again Galla-Rini was never a household name like Yo-Yo Ma or Itzhak Perlman or Jascha Heifetz either. No disrespect to him but these are just facts.

Art Van Damme was a household name! And while Art Van Damme was off the air 30 years ago, his name is still there today. You can mention his name in any jazz club in the country, or the world, and you will get a good response. And you may go to some off the wall place in South Africa and you'd get a great response. "Oh, yeah, Art Van Damme! I used to listen to him! Oh yeah, great! Great, yeah! What did he play?" "I think he used to play the accordion." "Oh yeah, the Art Van Damme sound!"

He had a quintet. It was patterned off Benny Goodman and George Shearing. It was a sound that the public could respond to as well as accordionists. It was a two-sided flag. Not just one-sided. Same with Piazzolla.

Piazzolla now is inspiring all kinds of accordionists like myself. But he was big before. He was big. How big—I mean what's big? It's still growing. It wasn't big enough, because he led a very dark life. He was seeking a success that really did not come until now that he's dead.

Rostropovich commissioned him to write a piece for him. Back in '82 before I even knew of Piazzolla. In the '70's, Bertolluci offered Piazzolla the scoring commission for *Last Tango in Paris* with Marlon Brando. Piazzolla was badly managed and didn't get the job. If he had gotten that job with Marlon Brando back in '72, '74, whenever it was, he would've been a lot more important through the '70s and the '80s. But it didn't happen till he died. But he had this quintet sound whether it was a sextet or a quintet, it was not just Astor Piazzolla in your face, the greatest bandoneon player in the world. Here listen to me razzle-dazzle you, I'm great! No.

It was a sound that just happened to have a bellowed instrument in it. And that's what I'm trying to create now because I've realized that, it's nice to play solo and I've always played solo but it gets lonely, playing for your friends (Laughter).

#### **It's a lot more fun with fellow musicians.**

Soave: Yeah, so I'm trying to get tailor-made arrangements.

#### **Are you looking for any particular coloration of instrument for example Van Damme hooked the accordion up with the vibraphone?**

Soave: Yeah, it worked and it's great. I like the string quartet right now. It's not the best. I'd like to have a septet or so. Strings, a piano, an upright bass where I could just do more of everything but string quartet, and myself, total quintet, it's a large group that can move. It's not pop sounding. It's not jazz and it's not your traditional string quartet which are a dime a dozen even though they're great and famous and in demand. But there's so many of them.

String quartet and myself right now is what I'm working at. Let me play a little bit of it, I think you'll understand what I'm saying....

### **Board Notes**

**The picnic will take place Sunday, July 8 at Nature Friends in the beautiful Oakland Hills.** This year we will offer New York steak. Details will follow. ¶ By selling coffee and soft drinks at meetings, we can offset some of the food costs. **Next Board Meeting: Tuesday, May 1, 2001 at 7:00 PM at Moose Lodge Daly City.**

## **CALENDAR**

### **Bay Area Accordion Club:**

**1st. Wed. 7:30 pm. Patio Español,**  
2850 Alemany  
San Francisco. 510.792.8765  
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>

### **East Bay Accordion Circle:**

**2nd Thurs. 7:30pm. 1542 Grant St.**  
Berkeley In the cottage behind the  
main house. Bring Your Accordion!  
Info: (510) 548-2822

### **ACR Fun Band Practice:**

**2nd Mon. 7-9pm. McDowell**  
Elementary School.  
421 South McDowell Blvd.  
Petaluma. Info: Gwyn Lister  
(415) 924-3202

### **Golden St. Accordion Club:**

**2nd Tues. Pietro's #2. 679 Merchant.**  
Vacaville. Info: (707) 864-2359

### **Good Time Accordion Club:**

**2nd Weds. Community Center. 7:00pm.**  
1055 Escalon Ave.  
Escalon, CA. Info: (209) 545-3603

### **ACR General Meeting:**

**3RD Mon. 7:30pm**  
Herman Sons Hall. 860 Western. Petaluma.  
Info. contact Harry Cannata (707) 838-2859

### **South Bay Jam**

**1st Sunday 2PM.**  
7th Day Adventist Church  
off Camden and Kooser.

### **BAAC Ensemble**

**2nd & 4th Weds 7pm.**  
Moose Lodge, Daly City.  
Call Frank Montoro (650) 574-4757 to confirm.

### **BAAC "Fun Band"**

**3rd Weds 7pm.**  
Moose Lodge Daly City.  
Call Val Kieser (510) 531-4836 to confirm.

### **Day of the Accordion**

**—San Francisco—**

**Sunday, June 17, 2001**The

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[tom@ladyofspain.com](mailto:tom@ladyofspain.com)

### **BAAC PICNIC**

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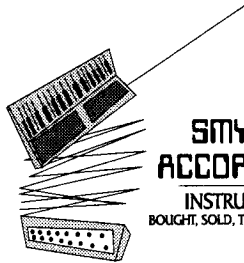
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**BAAC PAGE** would like to hear from our readers and we welcome any submission of material that might be of value to people interested in music and accordions of all persuasions. You may submit your articles to the address below. Or, contact our President Lou Soper by e-mail: <LouHSoper@aol.com>

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