

BAAC PAGE

Dedicated to the accordion through fun, service & education

December 2001: All Together—Play!

By Paul Allan Magistretti



The December meeting was dedicated to BAAC's three performance groups. Furthermore, the Fun Band was in the spotlight because this night marked the culmination of their raffle. Frank Schlotter did a terrific job promoting the event. He indicated that the proceeds exceeded anything they had anticipated and we may see them velvet Zoot Suits or get postcards from the Bahamas as winter drones on. I'll have more about the raffle later.

President Valerie Kieser began the meeting by thanking Harry Gay (Gaetano) for playing an opening set to get everyone in a mood for fun and the Christmas spirit. I needn't remind our members that Harry is a wonderful performer who thrives on playing and whose obvious joy flows as smoothly as fine Chianti. The *vino puro* analogy is doubly accurate, because Harry is proud of his heritage; I still remember his rendition of Italian songs the last time he played. Well, tonight he caroled, polkaed and eventually had everyone joining him in a song full of *Mama Mias* and we were quickly led into the spirit of the occasion—albeit, with a *Buon Natale* flavor.

Valerie announced that there will be two workshops for members in February. These are always important and well-attended events, which are free for BAAC members and cost \$10 & up for the public. So, now's a good time to renew your membership if you haven't already. Also, there will be a mini-workshop during the second half of March's general meeting, as she put it: "Stay tuned."

Valerie said the she and the Board were thrilled with the hard work our treasurer, Bob Pisani, put in on BAAC's books. They are finally in order. Now, we need to address the problem of income; dues are still coming in, but they're coming in slowly. Please, now that our accounts are in order and we're fiscally healthier than Enron, how about helping replenish our balance, so we can bring you more good times? BAAC's membership fee and door charges are modest—my God, in this day and age where could you get good fellowship, entertainment, education and food for the nominal fee we charge? Don't let us down. A single trip to the movies, stale popcorn and a disappointing film costs more than a year with us. We need to have all of you up-to-date and accounted for so we can execute this coming year's exciting schedule of programs.

The Board meeting: the Board discussed said upcoming

programs with the Program Committee and had a long discussion about the newsletter. [Ed. note: I've heard some on the Board would like to limit the NL to local news, pictures and ads, period—no long articles, historical articles, reviews, or non-local news They want to do this, while according to my sources, there are sufficient funds at this point to carry on with BAAC PAGE as it has been the past twenty months. There is obviously a conflict here regarding the purpose of the NL and editorial point of view, so perhaps it's time for a change of editors. But more on this later.]

Valerie asked for volunteers to come forward and play for us in January. You don't have to be a great player—not at all. We want to hear all players at all levels. Don't be shy. Share with us your love of the accordion and let us convey to you just how much we appreciate your talent—on any level. We're all friends here. Our theme for January is "winter." But you can play anything you like. Valerie then directed her attention to Barbara Winter, an excellent player (fortuitously named), who really impressed us at our picnic, and pleaded with her to play a few numbers, "Hey, we named the event for you."

February will be students' night—we also want to include teachers! Okay, teachers. Where are you and your students? How about it Lou Jacklich, Peter DiBono, Sharon Walters, Bart Benenico, Majorie Konrad, Valerie Morris, Lynn Ewing, Lou Soper, Ron Borelli? How about you *and your students* playing for us—solos, duets—any way you like. And wouldn't it be nice to see teachers playing *with* their students? I would think more than a few students would be thrilled to pair off with the maestro for BAAC's version of The Pro-Am.

Valerie made a request: members, please let us know what you're doing—where you're playing, going; performances you've done, things you've attended. Give us your personal news, chat and gossip on a regular basis. How can we know about you, if you don't speak up? BAAC PAGE is a medium through which members can communicate with each other between meetings. Let us know.

Parents and Grandparents—what about letting us know if we can perform at your kids' and/or grandchildren's schools? BAAC is ready, willing and able. We have to spread the message and let young people know about the accordion. BAAC and the accordion need young people; they're the future & just looking around,

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We Meet! January 2, 7:00 PM at Patio Español.

it's obvious that the average age of our club may be pushing 60.

Frank Schlotter asked for the floor and read a message from Boaz. Boaz was sorry he couldn't attend, but he wished BAAC well. Boaz and Judy have been solid supporters of BAAC; he refurbished *gratis* the accordion that was raffled. And Boaz is always having an event of some kind to further the instrument (which they promote very well; admirably, in fact) and they have been a positive force in the area [see elsewhere for a review of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*].

One final note: Valerie thanked Eddie Zaro—what can we say about Eddie? Perfect attendance for eleven years, taping every show, archiving the club's past with energy and dedication, helping friends and neighbors with rides to doctors; plus, he's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. Anyway, Eddie donated a raffle drum—spin the handle and you mix up the tickets. It's a nice addition to the club and was a big help for this night in particular; the thing was stuffed.

Valerie turned the meeting over to Lynn Ewing our MC for the evening—something Lynn does very well.

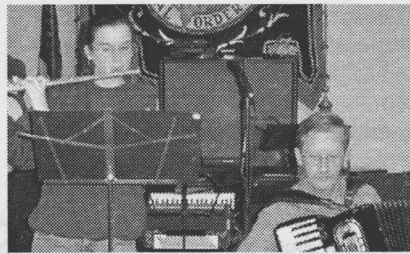
The Fun Band was up first. They played *Danube Waves* (more popularly, *The Anniversary Waltz*). This was a challenging arrangement in two parts and they did a good job. Then, we had some seasonal songs, *Frosty the Snowman*, *Silver Bells*, *White Christmas* and a comical *All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth*. Henry Mancini's *Dear Heart* was next, nicely done—and that led to what for me was their best effort *ever*, a four part rendition of *Coventry Carol*. They really came together on this one.

Joe Smiell took the floor with the BAAC Ensemble. They started with Sir Arthur Sullivan's *The Lost Chord*. This is the Sullivan of Gilbert & Sullivan and the work was one of Sir Arthur's chamber



works. Joe assured us, that if you listened you could hear the lost chord—but then, it wouldn't be lost anymore. Next, the Ensemble performed the traditional *O Little Town of Bethlehem* and finally, *Danny Boy*; the latter was a well-structured, multi-part arrangement that was quite beautiful and the audience asked for an encore. However, there was a full program scheduled and we had to settle for Intermission.

During the Intermission, Bob Berta and Kristine Berta played carols (accordion and flute). Kristine made a special trip to



perform with her dad. The results were wonderful and unfortunate—wonderful for the way they played, unfortunate that they were tossed into the confusion of the break. The only way I could hear was to stand very close, practically sticking my head between them, as if they were the right & left earpieces on a headset. Bob later told me they could barely hear each other and that I probably heard more than they did. It was a shame; what I heard was lovely—deeply felt, expressive and sincere. *Someone* should have looked after them—had them wait and put them on at the start of the second half when everyone was seated, quiet and ready to listen—the loss was ours. But thanks Bob & Kristine for a valiant

effort.

The Accordion Chamber Ensemble (ACE), the club's most advanced group, opened the second half of the program. [Note: in her opening announcements, Valerie stressed that our performance ensembles are open to any and all members. You don't



have to be a virtuoso to play with any of the groups and she encouraged every member to come and join.] ACE's performance tonight included a Christmas Potpourri of familiar carols—Joe emphasized that Christmas songs contain some excellent music and shouldn't be overlooked because of seasonal familiarity—and he did justice to a nice selection. Next, ACE performed a Polish Christmas medley, a lovely arrangement of *White Christmas* and a Czech polka. Joe gave an introduction to the Czech polka, saying that Dvorak, Smetana and other classical composers of Czech origin took the polka very seriously and there was a lot of cross-fertilization between it and classical Czech music. [Of course, the 19th century saw many composers like Brahms and Listz looking to folk music (later Bartok, Shostakovich, etc., it was a big movement in the classics) for inspiration (e.g., Brahms' *Hungarian Rhapsodies*). The polka was a natural for the Czechs, because it was of Bohemian (Czech) origin, "supposedly invented by a Czech serving girl in 1830" and first danced in Prague five years later. Afterwards the dance found its way to European capitals and America. The name, polka, refers to the characteristic half-step of the dance, or *pulka* in Czech. The dance as adopted by the 1840's was graceful and soon after its introduction was danced face-to-face; there were five figures, including the familiar "heel & toe." An example of its use in classical music is found in Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*.] The last number of the evening by ACE was a stunning surprise. Joe disclaimed any mastery of popular and swing music, but he said he gave it a try with an arrangement of Hoagy Carmichael's *Star Dust*. Well, it was absolutely beautiful. Hoagy would be as thrilled as we were and Joe and ACE got a well-deserved standing ovation.

The evening wasn't over. We had the raffle to conclude. First off, Jim Firpo won new back straps donated by Valerie Kieser. I was glad to see Jim win; he's such a hard worker for the club and a genuine nice guy. As advertised: you didn't have to be present to win—and we really missed her—Lou Soper's wife, Mary, won the accordion stand! Lou was there to receive it on her behalf and he seemed quite happy; he was relatively sure Mary would let him use it (if he's good). Rudi Johnson won a soft cover accordion case. Rudi's a friend of Val's from Berkeley and a generous person; he donated the prize back to the club for a future re-raffle on behalf of our scholarship fund. Finally, the big prize, the 120 bass accordion, thoroughly reconditioned & tuned by Boaz. George

Alves of San Jose was the lucky guy! George wasn't there, but Frank Schlotter said he'd personally see that George received it. The instrument is quite good—a light strolling accordion and we're sure George will be tickled. With that—Frank thanked everyone for their generosity and the evening came to a close, except for everyone enjoying a terrific Christmas spread put on by Fran and Dom Benedetto. There were sandwiches,



cheese, cold cuts, cake, Italian biscuits, Fran's famous zucchini relish and—cherry pie! Where else can such good things happen? You join BAAC for a fee that is really modest in today's world, pay \$3 at the door and get entertainment and all you can eat of superb food. Get real, people—join up before we decide to keep it all to ourselves. And what about Fran and Dom? They outdid them-

selves for Christmas; they are absolute treasures. Not only was everything superb, but imagine the hard work they put in to do it. Plus, they were there still packing and cleaning up long after everyone was gone. Next time you see them—let them know that you know how great they are & maybe lend a hand. That's all for now. See you January 2nd at Patio Español—*Feliz Año Nuevo!*



C A S T E L F I D A R D O

Fateful Meeting—Again!

By Dennis Stoscher

[Editor's note: We continue with the Fateful Meeting first reported by Bob Pisani in last month's BAAC PAGE. Here is Dennis Stoscher's version. The importance of the event resides not just in our members meeting as they did, but in the site. The tiny town of Castelfidardo may lie thousands of miles from San Francisco, but it's the one place on earth where almost all the accordions in the world are born—or at least, the good ones, according to the natives. Also, the place is like an Italian Lourdes—a shrine for sufferers of Polka Redux Disease, PRD. So, it was only natural that Dennis Stoscher who had been attending an aggravating aggregation in Venice would steal down the coast from the rocky horror show and fulfill a vow to Galla-Rini by committing an act of devotion known as the Stations of the Factories. Dennis is a borderline PRDer and only a will of blue steel has kept him alive during the long absences from donning his raincoat and cruising the malls of Palo Alto where he shows off his mighty musette.]

Continuing the story—when Dennis stepped out of his rent-a-bug and took a deep breath—he knew he was at the center of the accordion world. He strolled up the street with his lovely wife Elna and in the midst of his excitement had a dark thought. What if his thrill-filled heart burst? How do you say CPR in Italian? What effect do inhaled Chianti, garlic and gorgonzola breath have on an American immune system if matters came to mouth-to-mouth from a tall dark EM-uh-T? Like almost everything in life this peregrination could turn out to be a mixed blessing. La Forza del Destino (The Force of Destiny) is about a world ruled by irony (as Verdi would have it)—fate gives you a spoon and no soup, a bellows and no reeds, accordion ecstasy and no one likewise afflicted to share it with.

And yet! Sometimes the clouds part, a dove descends and the waters recede: around the corner came Bob Pisani and his wife Dil. There is no greater happiness than meeting a friendly colleague of the same musical persuasion in a strange land. But let Dennis tell it.]



Pisani & Vignoni



Elna and I were finally on a much awaited business trip/vacation/family visit despite the tragic events of 9/11. Many thought we were either crazy or brave to be making a trip at this time, but our need to lead our lives normally and not react to terrorism won the day.

On completion of the business portion of the trip and a few pleasant stops along the way we, of course, arrived in Castelfidardo.

I knew that Marion Kelly had acquired a wonderful new accordion from Fisart and I was determined to search out and see what this brand was all about. About 252 steps from the Fisarmonica Museum, up Via Garibaldi, we finally located Fisart. We had driven past the place twice and walked past the entrance three times when a delightful grandmother across the street pointed at the tiny sign and motioned us to push the button! Immediately the smiling, enthusiastic face of Giancarlo Vignoni greeted us from his second story window and buzzed us through, meeting us at the stop of the stairs and escorting us into his candy store (accordions are like candy, aren't they). Giancarlo invited me to pick an accordion, any accordion and have a taste. Oh, my! My

heart was pounding. What an assortment of colors, sizes, shapes, reeds, bellows, buttons, tone chambers, keyboards, switches and sounds! A trip through See's Candies would never be as good as this and everything in Fisart-ville wasn't fattening!

After playing an almond joy, a macadamia, a peanut cluster, a marzipan and a chewy nugget, Giancarlo appeared holding a classic black, piano accordion with ivory colored keys. I was in a near-diabetic stupor, but I perked up and was just semi-conscious enough to ask: "What have you got there?" In his charming English and with no little pride in his voice, Giancarlo said, "This-uh is a veery immmportant fisarmonica." I guessed his meaning was that it was maybe, perhaps, sort of, kind of, a little bit, "special." Italians are an enthusiastic, demonstrative lot, even the ones on the Adriatic. So, I took what he said with a grain of *pecorino*. But I figured, I'm here, he's pleasant, I'll humor him. So, I put the veery immmportant thing-uh on and played a few notes. I felt like a moth straying into a bug zapper without seeing the blue light. I was back in high school in the back seat of dad's car with the prettiest girl in school—who had never given me the time of day before and was now giving me two weeks and a long weekend. Put it this way, once the accordion was in my arms, I was in-a love-uh. Like the song says, "I could have played all night, I could have played all night and still have played some more, I could have spread my fingers and played a thousand tunes, I never played before" (with apologies to Alan Jay Lerner and *My Fair Lady*). Put it this way (again) I wasn't sure, but one of us was Julie Andrews and the other was Rex Harrison and I didn't care which was

which, I was hooked and this sweet dream machine was coming home with me-uh. We told Giancarlo that we would be back in a week to see him and attend the accordion festival after we took a side trip to visit my son and his family in Albania (that, *signori*, is another story).

A week later we returned to Castelfidardo. The accordion of my dreams I had come to believe was inhabited by the ghost of Eliza Dolittle; I kept hearing, "Lots of chocolates for me to eat, ohhh, wouldn't it be lovely." I felt the way Lucy and Ethel looked stuffing more candy in their mouths than in the boxes. I couldn't get enough of Giancarlo's veery immmmportant accordion. When I finally tore myself away it was only with the promise that it would be awaiting our arrival home.



Now, in this high state of reed-aphoria, I

suddenly heard my name called in a happy, surprised voice. I tried to focus on the real world and I was stunned to see Bob and Dil Pisani from our very own BAAC; they were here & we were meeting ten thousand miles from home. Fate or what? My wife, Elna, was delighted to finally meet them (especially Dil) and have a chance to sing duets of *The Accordion Player Wives Blues*, not to mention all the other things they have in common. On the gal's second chorus, the part about "Nobody knows the treble I've seen," a single thought popped into Bob's and my minds—can you say, "factory tours? I knew you could." Off Bob and I went with the women in pursuit calling our names and pleading for divine intervention.

It may be impossible to locate and visit all the accordion factories in Castelfidardo, but Bob and I with two weary women in tow (who amazingly still loved us), came close. It was great to meet Bob and Dil and share our adventures in squeezing.

Castelfidardo is in a state of transition. Many of the older manufacturing companies are either in the process of or have moved and/or have changed ownership. A new generation is emerging with strong concepts of new technology and innovative designs combined with a reverence for the fine instruments of the past. They seem to be getting the mix of old and new just right and are making some accordions of astounding quality.

Later, Bob visited Fisart on his own (with help from the same sweet grandmother) and discovered his own Vignoni—a story which he told very well last month. So, Bob and I can not only play harmonious duets, but (and his accordion arrived on the same plane as mine) we have a breeding pair!

On our own the next day, Elna and I ambled down a narrow, cobbled street toward the *Museo di Fisarmoniche* enjoying the warm October sun. There were excited clusters of teenage boys and girls who tried to tell us (in English and Italian that was sometimes Greek to us) where the venues of the International Fisarmonica Competition were. Finally, they led us like so many beardless shepherds to a building, which was where they were headed anyway. We entered a small, nondescript hallway and passed through a velvet curtain into a beautiful church sanctuary that seated about a 100 people. This was where the competition was being held.

Each contestant played the same first number and then any selection they desired for the remaining allotted time. It is difficult to describe the conflicting emotions that washed over me when I watched some of these young teenage contestants play. I felt a combination of wonder, inspiration and depression: wonder at the

incredible talent these young people had; inspiration to practice and improve my own modest skills; and deep, deep depression that, even if my brain and fingers had ever responded in micro seconds like I witnessed with these kids, they wouldn't any longer!

We listened to several Polish, Russian, Italian and Chinese teenaged musicians, each one a new revelation. Luckily, English seems to be the common language among all these young contestants, even if *fortissimo* and *vivace* are written on their scores, so we were able to have a delightful time chatting after the performances with several of them along with their parents. They were all (parents and performers) a fascinating study—on the one hand, so focused and intense—and yet, at moments just normal kids and proud parents having a good time. I was really impressed with each and every one—our instrument is in good hands and the future is assured; at least, in Europe and Asia.

When we arrived home from the trip, who was waiting for me? You know who! Julie Andrews! My new, sweet accordion was primed and panting to be picked up in a lovely way. If any of you are interested in having a similar beauty to share next year and the years to come with, forget escort services & ask me about true love. In the meantime, keep squeezing and sweet dreams. Love, Dennis.

Afghani Celebration



Peter Di Bono sent the the above photo and Jon Hammond heard a broadcast on National Public Radio about a music teacher who hid his accordion for years from the Taliban. Then, with the withdrawal from Kabul he was able to get his instrument out of hiding. He first played a chromatic scale to see if it worked, then he played an Afghani song. These were the first sounds of music heard in his school in years! The caption on the above photo may identify the accordionist as the singer Aziz Khaznavi and he was performing for the first time in years in Kabul's Radio and Television station.

From Greece

A bayan recital by Constantinos Raptis was held at the Philippos Nakas Concert Hall in Athens on December 12th. His program included works by Gubaidulina (*De Profundis*), Scarlatti (*Sonata in F minor*), Kagel, Liszt (*Gnomenreigen*), Tiensuu, Piazzolla (*Sentido Unico*), Bartok, Kyriakakis and Konstantinidis. Konstantinos Raptis revealed the harmonic potential of the bayan through religious music, the tango, Balkan music and virtuoso pieces by both contemporary and earlier musicians. Many of the pieces included in this program were performed for the first time in Greece and for the first time on a bayan. **From Elina Tsangaraki**

President's Message

By Valerie T. Kieser



Our January meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 2, 2002 at Patio Español! Please note that we will be back at Patio Español, in the smaller room at the back of the restaurant.

The theme for January will be wintry weather (*Stormy Weather, Let It Snow*, you can come up with others). Valarie Morris' quartet will be playing her *Storm* series and a couple

of other numbers. Frank Schlotter plans to play, and we have a couple of other "maybes." So, please think about coming and playing at the January meeting, even if it is outside the theme. Themes are only suggestions!

Since the drawing for the Fun Band benefit raffle has taken place, we will return to having our usual drawing at the meetings. Congratulations to those who won the top prizes in the Fun Band raffle: George Alves won the accor-

dion, Mary Soper won the stand (much to Lou's delight), Jim Firpo won the back straps—and my own friend from Berkeley Rudi Johnson won the accordion case, which he kindly donated back to the club. We would like to sell it and give the money to the Scholarship Fund. We'll take it to the next meeting so you can have a closer look. It's a beautiful case.

February will be students/teachers night, and so far it is promising to be a very special meeting. I have contacted most of the teachers in the Bay Area, but if I missed any, please call me and say you'll come and bring at least one student!

Those whose dues have not reached my hands by mid-December will find a pre-addressed envelope in their December newsletter for that purpose. If you have already paid, or are not sure whether you paid, please give me (Val) a call at (510) 531-4836.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful and peaceful Holiday Season!

BAAC—2001



A Color Club Photo is available in two different sizes. It's a custom print suitable for framing in either 12 x 24 for \$40; or, in 5 x 10 for \$15. **This is at cost!** If you'd like a copy send your check to Bob Berta, 4 Park Manor Drive, Daly City, CA. 94015. Include name and return address.

Dues Are Payable Now
Kindly remit ASAP to:
San Francisco
Bay Area Accordion Club
PO Box 318175
San Francisco, CA 94131-8175

Vince On Channel 5

On Sunday, Dec. 9th Channel 5 had a neat segment on **Vince Cirelli**. The interview was focused on the fact that he was the last accordion builder in the area—probably in the entire country. It talked about the history of the accordion in San Francisco and it focused on the craftsmanship required to build an instrument. Vince had a few sub assemblies to show the components of an accordion. I thought it was very interesting and they even had him play his accordion—a new Petosa reedless! Ironic for a acoustic accordion maker, but thoroughly like Vince to be both ancient and modern in his wise ways. I videotaped the interview if anyone wants to see it. **Bob Berta**

O MIO BABBINO CARO

Gianni Schicchi

Orchestral Version

Puccini
Arr. By Gary Dahl

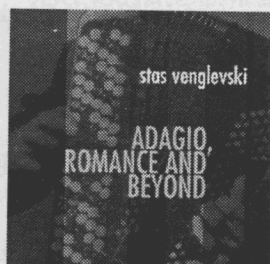
The musical score is divided into two main sections: **Moderato** and **Andantino**. The **Moderato** section begins with a tempo marking of 6/8 and includes dynamics such as *mf*, *legato*, *M*, and *m*. The **Andantino** section follows, marked with a 6/8 time signature and dynamics including *M*, *m*, *rit.*, and *pp*. The score features a vocal line with various ornaments and a piano accompaniment with complex textures, including triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. The piece concludes with a *rit.* marking and a *pp* dynamic.

Gary Dahl has kindly sent another one of his arrangements for the enjoyment of BAAC members. This is a great aria from Puccini's Gianni Schicchi, where a daughter pleads with her "Dear Pappa" to let her marry the man she loves, lest she throw herself off the Ponte Vecchio in despair. It's humorous & touching. The melody is absolutely beautiful. Give it a try!

Adagio, Romance & Beyond

A CD Review of Stas Venglevski

By Paul Allan Magistretti



Stas Venglevski's new CD is a significant contribution to what is becoming an impressive career. The young Moldavian bayanist, now living in Milwaukee, has built upon his technical skill and is achieving greater maturity and depth. His last CD, *Accordion Illusions*, was a fine work—in fact, a favorite of mine; I called it *fisarmonica pura*. It was simple, direct and moving. The accordion sound

and playing were something only an accordion could deliver and the effect was intimate and timeless, like warm-hearted folk music from Russia, France and Argentina. *Illusions* was totally comprised of Stas' own compositions arranged as solos and duets (with Mike Alongi); there were numerous, thoroughly convincing musette tunes, tangos and Moldavian waltzes. It was a significant accomplishment for a young composer to create illusions as satisfying as a French soiree, an Argentinian café or late night in a lonely hut on the Steppes of Russia. Also, there were heartfelt tributes to friends and family.

While *Illusions* was evocative and emotionally satisfying. Stas' playing was greatly improved. He was always a technical whiz (this strength may have been his weakness), but on *Accordion Illusions* he began to reach beyond what was natural and easy for him; he slowed down, got *within* the pieces and began to find depth. His phrasing started to breathe more easily and he got closer to the emotional and biological center of the music. And while *Accordion Illusions* revealed him as a better, more sensitive player, he displayed a solid talent for melody. He showed significant accomplishment with the genres he attempted—plus, he composed a lovely children's suite, a series of well-crafted miniatures, that were suggestive of mice, monkeys, elephants and birds.

The album before *Accordion Illusions* was *The Nutcracker Suite*; it was a finely transposed and expanded version of the Tchaikovsky ballet in concert form. Stas' performance was thorough and stirring. He demonstrated a definite improvement over his first CD *Stas!*

Stas! featured him on solos and with a quartet (two violins, cello and piano). He was good with the ensemble, though there was a tendency to seem oddly reticent and disappear; the solos were often rushed and misleadingly superficial because of their dash and the lightness of his touch. However, it was easy to tell he was a young man of promise and this initial CD was just a beginning for someone who might have significant talent. What I remember best on *Stas!* was *Por Una Cabaza* (though the bayan part was minimal), Bach's *Tocatta & Fugue in D Minor* (it was a bit academic, as if Lips was hovering), Astier's *Miss Karting*; crisp and deft, but a bit flippant and without the necessary admiration and irony intended for *la femme*. Also included were a number of accordion classics (*Bumble Bee*, *Jolly Caballero*, *Flight of the Angels*, *Carnival of Venice*, etc). They were all well played, sometimes flashy, but they seemed like erstwhile student works. Well, by the time I first heard the CD I had heard him at a recital and he had already become a better player than was represented on the recording. Don't get me wrong; he wasn't bad on the CD, it's still worthwhile listening, but he's so much better now.

Stas' latest CD *Adagio, Romance and Beyond* is his best work to date—I'll call it a maturing work, because it contains both fulfillment and lot of promise. The album features three new compositions composed especially for the bayan—two by Stas himself. New works dedicated to our instrument are always good news,

but the fact that they're excellent works is great news. It's important for composers (especially accordion/bayan players) to write directly for the instrument. A dedicated repertoire will finally define the instrument and our artists to the world at large, the way Chopin or even Piazzolla have done.

Piazzolla worked for a long time in various tango orchestras, wrote arrangements for them and dreamed of composing classical music. He studied with Ginastera and pursued a lifelong fascination with Bach, Stravinsky, Bartok and Prokofiev and remained conflicted, if not embarrassed, about the tango. He won a contest for a classical composition in 1954, the award of which was a year's study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, who was famous as the teacher of Copland, Thomson, Piston and others. Piazzolla hid the fact that his main instrument was the bandoneon. He wrote his exercises in harmony and counterpoint and did as little as possible at the piano. One day she asked him what his instrument was and he told her it was the bandoneon. She told him to go back to his apartment and get it. When he played for her, she told him that it was his natural instrument and the music he imagined for it should be his *métier*.

In an analogous way, Stas is searching for his *métier* in his two new works *Adagio* and *Romance*. They are solid, revealing increased depth—and while still remaining linked to his feelings for ethnic music they seem to want to be more. The first, longer piece, *Adagio*, is elegiac in feeling, introspective and contains a central section that is a fugue. It's his longest composition to date and a good one comprised of several moods. As he deepens his composing talent I would expect a work like this to find greater complexity, more development of its fugal potential and a denser contrapuntal layering. Some of the shifts in mood could become subtler and more discrete in making transitions, but all in all *Adagio* is an excellent piece, reminiscent of his previous *Always and Eternity* and absolutely worth listening to repeatedly. Playing it, he reaches well into the piece's emotional layers. Also, he's beginning to find a greater facility with silence (not rest) as a musical component. If and when he is able to just hang onto notes a few micro-seconds longer, he will have it all. Of course, hanging onto notes isn't so much of a criticism as a hope. The only accordionist I've ever heard hang onto notes with the technique of a Casals or Heifetz was Christine Rossi and from a recent CD I've heard, I don't think she does it any longer—perhaps because of influences from the Russian school. But while it lasted she possessed an astonishing facility that was almost unique among accordion players. Stas is almost there throughout this CD.

His second original piece, *Romance*, is a poignant waltz with nice development as the melody turns upon itself. As it becomes more complicated it has a quality almost like one of Chopin's little gems. Then, there's a fast Astier-like development before it returns to the opening theme—a superb miniature, achieving a great range of feeling in a short time. Throughout this CD I particularly liked the way Stas used *rubato*—holding back, rushing ahead a little and often achieving beautifully expressive *dimenuendi* and *crescendi*; his playing on this CD is a giant step ahead.

Listen to the opening number, *Concert Fantasy on Russian Themes* by Eugene Debenko. The control Stas is gaining over his instrument is the best I've heard him achieve and better than most major bayanists. He's not blowing notes out the grill, he's finding a voice and singing the music for us. Also, no matter how fast he's playing now, there's usually a spaciousness within the phrase. I don't want to make exaggerated comparisons, but let me say just

(Turn to page 13)

Practice Techniques Achieve Your Best Performance

By Philip Pivovar

[Philip Pivovar is from El Paso, Texas. He's a graduate of the Dept. of Music, Indiana University of PA and has a Master of Music from the Hart School of Music, University of Hartford, Conn. (with a major in guitar performance). He has a strong interest in folk music and plays with the Pivovar Trio at polka festivals throughout the country.]

A good friend of mine recently complained to me that he thought he had "fractured concentration" and claimed it was affecting his musical performance. Not only that, he thought that he was afflicted with an irregularity, perhaps a disability. I quickly realized how common this sensation is among performers and commented that he wasn't the only one who had experienced fractured concentration. Furthermore I asked, "Are there those who don't have fractured concentration?" I thought perhaps they might be the likes of Franz Liszt, Itzhak Perlman or basketball star, Michael Jordan. Most others need to learn how to deal with fractured concentration.

According to Seymour Bernstein in his book, *With Your Own Two Hands*, there are two types of concentration: deliberate concentration and spontaneous concentration. Deliberate concentration is something you make yourself do by focusing your attention on a specific activity. Spontaneous or natural concentration occurs when you become interested and involved in what you are doing without intent. This natural concentration occurs when you become deeply involved in a book or movie or when children become engrossed in a game. Sight reading music is an example where deliberate concentration can induce spontaneous or natural concentration as you are drawn into the music.

Great performers allow themselves to be absorbed into their music performance. They control their deliberate concentration to transcend to natural concentration, a trans-hypnotic-like state of mind. In the book, *The Art of Piano Playing*, George Kochevitsky claims that "Inspiration combined with constant self control is the ideal state of mind of a performing artist." With practice, all performers can close in on this level of playing. Today, in sports and other performing activities, we have heard it commonly called being "In the Zone."

TRYING TO REACH THE NEXT LEVEL?

I can't say I am any better performing "In the Zone" than most, but I can say I have worked at it quite a bit. One thing I have learned is that we can pick up practice techniques commonly used in the study of other instruments. Is learning to be a concert accordionist any different than learning to be a concert pianist or violinist? The mechanics are obviously different, but many practice techniques are interchangeable.

Orchestral instruments and piano have a great history of successful teaching. There have been more than one hundred books (not lesson books) written in English on playing the piano. Why not learn from progress that has already been made and which may more easily lead to successful, solid performances?

TWO-HANDED INSTRUMENTS

The accordion is one of the musical instruments that requires both hands to produce music. I like the term two-handed instruments. The greatest two-handed instrument is the piano which has complete musical and physical independence between the left and right hands. In fact, the hands are so independent that a number of compositions have been written for the left hand alone.

Wind instruments require two hands to perform but the hands for the most part are wholly dependent on one another. They are not what I call two-handed instruments. Other two-handed instruments have varying amounts of right and left hand physical independence which in turn affect the amount of musical independence of the hands. As an example, string instruments require both hands to physically produce a note (except for open strings). In spite of this limitation, some of the most complete music ever written with beautiful counterpoint and harmonic content are for solo string instruments such as, J. S. Bach's *Chaconne* for Violin. Andres Segovia would refer to his guitar as a "little orchestra."

There are many types of accordions and all, of course, have complete left hand and right hand physical independence. Some have complete musical independence between the left and right hands, like the free-bass accordion as played by Guy Klucsevsek. But the left hand on most accordions has been designed with reduced musical independence. The left hand functions in an accompaniment role with occasional bass flourishes and thus depends musically on the right hand. Perhaps because of this the left hand and right hand on the accordion physically involve quite different activities.

Two-handed instruments require a unique level of concentration with special practice techniques and, of course, are much more fun to play.

PRACTICE—ONE HAND AT A TIME

The learning process for every learned composition should involve two processes: the physical process (the hands) and the mental process (the mind). Of course, all performance involves both processes but there are different practice techniques to thoroughly involve each process. Ultimately, you practice to establish conditioned reflexes. I once learned that the mind can actually focus on only one thing at a time, but will quickly switch from one thing to another with speed and depth faster than any computer. Let's explore practice techniques that accommodate both the mental and physical learning process.

Try practicing using your right hand alone to specifically involve the mental process. Work on one section or phrase at a time. Play the section once with your mind deliberately concentrating on listening to the music and not being distracted by the mechanics. This is easy, but very productive. Then, play it again with your concentration on the mechanics and put the music in the background. Focus your attention on what the right hand is doing: fingers used, in and out bowing, etc. Do you notice any technical problems that need work?

Now, practice the left hand alone. This is much more difficult with no melody. You can follow your music notation on this drill if you have trouble keeping track of the length of the phrases and where the cadences occur. Also, try singing the right hand part while playing the left hand alone. This is great mental practice. Make a recording of the right hand alone and play the left hand with your recording. Again, alternate your focus from the music to the mechanics. Listen to the recorded right hand and put the left hand on automatic. Even though this activity involves both parts of the music, this is quite different than actually playing both hands together.

Next, play both hands together, but force your attention to the left hand only. This is tough. Then play both hands and try to listen to the right hand only. This is easier because it is what you normally do. Hear the music of the right or left hand only for the whole phrase. Then repeat the phrase with the focus on the other

hand. It is not natural, but a worthwhile exercise. Later, in performance, it won't matter where your mind focuses as a result of fractured concentration. Alternate your attention from the music to the mechanics. Sing with your playing while deliberately thinking of the fingering.

After you have spent some time on these mental exercises, play the entire piece without stopping. Abandon all focus on detail and let automated motor activity take over (automatic pilot), while not being overly concerned with mistakes. See if you can allow yourself to move from deliberate concentration you have been practicing to spontaneous or natural concentration. Now is the time to have fun and enjoy the fruits of your labors.

If you systematically do this a few minutes every day on some of your music, (eventually all your music), you will greatly improve your performance and help deal with fractured concentration. This is hard work and much different than just playing over and over with no actual progress taking place. Remember, you may never improve if you continue to practice by simply playing the piece over and over. Playing your instrument is fun and practice is hard work. The last 10% of your performance perfection requires 90% of your efforts.

"STOP" PRACTICING

With tongue in cheek, I call this practice technique "stop practicing", it involves the physical process (the hands). This practice technique aims to eliminate dead space. It can improve performance which requires a quick and awkward leap as well as a series of notes, like a scale. Dead space is the excess time between the notes that prevents an increase in speed. If you can reduce the time between the notes you can increase your speed. Practicing for speed alone can create tension and actually create a barrier that inhibits improvement. It's a contradiction, but practicing slowly to eliminate the "dead space" will allow you to improve your speed of execution while free of tension.

Let's call the "attack zone" or "ready zone" the ideal placement of the fingers just before execution. You want the most relaxed and prepared hand/finger position that you could possibly have immediately before execution. Once a note has been executed, practice moving to the next attack position and stopping in the attack position. Don't play the next note. STOP! Watch your hands/fingers for flailing movements with no purpose. Eliminate purposeless movement. Make sure your shoulders, elbows and feet (heels on the floor) are relaxed and subject to the pull of gravity. You should notice if you are fighting gravity. This causes muscle tension which inhibits a peak performance. Remember to exhale.

You are now eliminating dead space. How quickly can you get to the next attack position? This will guarantee an improvement in speed and proper execution with ease. This can be done note by note or wherever you find you need to "wood-shed." This will also allow you to smooth a run so that all notes have equal attack, volume and exact rhythm.

If you haven't done it before, check your fingering. It's been said Chopin thought that everything depends on good fingering. What choices have you made for the fingering? Do you use the same fingers every time or just grab a handful? Why? Have you noted it in your music? (visual reinforcement). Fingering choices should be based on the best presentation of the music and not necessarily the easiest to execute. Starting a phrase with the wrong finger during a performance can lead to a problem which can quickly snowball.

VARY THE SPEED

Varying the speed can wake up both the physical and mental processes. Use a metronome at extremely slow speeds. At half speed you will think you have never played the passage before.

Ignore your bellows (air) problems because of the slow speed, but concentrate on fingering, hand and body posture. Your mind has a chance to hear the music like never before, let it absorb the music from this different time perspective. Apply concentration to the right hand or left hand only, but at slow speeds. At slow speeds your mind has a lot of time to think. Try to focus your thoughts on one musical feature throughout the entire phrase.

Play the right hand and left hand alone to listen for technical weaknesses. Technically, are you satisfied with the rhythm and balance of your bass note and chord alternation? Are your bass runs balanced and flowing? Frequently, tempo problems originate with the left hand.

Once you can play the section at half speed, gradually allow yourself to approach regular speed and maintain what you have learned. Play with the metronome at intermediate speeds and at your performance speed. Regular practice at different speeds is very important.

You can clean up a lot of "garbage" with the above practice techniques. Try to have clear goals and objectives before you start your practice session. Which of these practice techniques will you apply? What are you trying to accomplish?

Select from your present and future repertoire passages that give you technical trouble. Develop technical drills based on those musical fractals alone. Practice these fractals as if they had nothing to do with the composition itself. Don't perform, execute. At the end of the practice take note of what you accomplished. I guarantee you will have improved your execution and performance techniques. This is real practice that can get you to the next level. Thousands of hours of mindless repetition will not accomplish this.

ANALYSIS

Study your music. Analyze your music as far as the chord structure and phrasing is concerned. Where are the tonic chords and dominant chords? Which cadences are more or less important? Which are transitional? Does the melody outline chords or passing tones? Are there any moments of transition that are exciting? What notes are most important to you and how will you play them? Why? This is mental study that can anchor your thoughts during performance.

BREATHING

Don't ever hold your breath while playing. Take a quick, deep breath before each phrase begins and gradually exhale during the phrase. This allows your mind to be free and keeps your whole nervous system relaxed. If you practice this way, you will perform this way. It is much like playing a wind instrument. Having played both wind instruments and string instruments, I still find that I take a quick breath before each phrase, wind or string. In your mind let it sing. Your playing will respond.

PERFORMER'S NERVES

Some call it "stage fright," but I prefer to call it "performer's nerves." There are few performers who are not agitated before a public performance. First, there is the desire to play at one's best and secondly, you are required to play in an unfamiliar performance setting. The stage arrangement, the lighting, the unusual sound conditions, the audience, and general unfamiliar surroundings can cause the adrenaline to start to flow. Adrenaline can cause problems during a performance. Your mind can start listening to things that you haven't listened to during practice. If you have used the practice techniques described in this essay, you will have practiced listening to all parts of the piece and addressed all technical issues. When you perform, your mind will be free to stray without fear of "fractured concentration."

Mental preparation can help you channel the adrenaline to a positive effect. Being on the stage with an eager sensitive audi-

ence can inspire you to play with great enthusiasm. Your hearing can be more acute and can help you create a synergy with the other musicians. Try to convey your energy to the audience and create excitement.

To learn how to mentally prepare for a performance, consider buying a book and learning self hypnosis, or the term I like better is "visualization." Have you ever heard athletes comment that they need to get up for the game or put their game face on? This comes from the mind. Professional athletes use visualizing to achieve peak performance. Why shouldn't that help you reach peak performance?

SUBMISSION

Finally, if you have practiced this method, then go for the gold. Take a moment before you start to play to flip the mental switch like a golfer before he putts. Try performing with complete submission to the music. Let go and give in to the music. Listen to the music and nothing else. An occasional mistake should not distract you or your audience. If you are suddenly human and start thinking about what happens next, don't panic. It is not a problem; you will be able to recover in seconds because you have already practiced thinking about what happens next: left hand, right hand, both hands, dominant chords and tonic chords—aw, shut up and listen to the music and have fun! You are fully prepared.

Fun Band Raffle Finale

By Frank Schlotter, Band Manager

The band's raffle was a smashing success. More than enough ticket sales were made to cover the costs of the new red vests with the BAAC logo and FUN BAND on the back. George Alves of San Jose was the winner of the Recanti accordion and promises to attend the January 2nd BAAC meeting to be awarded the prize. He plans to give the instrument to his eleven-year old grandson, in hopes that he will become an accordionist. We are hoping that the grandson will accompany his grandfather.

Our many thanks and appreciation to all members and non-members who so generously dug deep in support of BAAC's own band. Also, thanks to Boaz Rubin who donated the accordion renovation, the 120 bass soft accordion case and the accordion stand. Val Kieser gave the accordion strap and Frank Schlotter provided the Recanti 120 bass accordion.

We hope to see Lou Soper using Mary's accordion stand on the BAAC stage, soon. How about some *Baby, It's Cold Outside* at the January meeting, Lou? Sing it and swing it. Come see us in our new uniforms at a spring meeting or at the BAAC picnic. A Happy and musical New Year to you.

Brescia, Italy



A Contemporary Music Concert was held on December 14th at the San Carlino Theatre in Brescia by the *Trio della signora*, which included Eugenia Marini (accordion), Eliana Gintoli (cello) and Omar Lonati (double bass). The concert featured the world premiere of two pieces written expressly for the trio: Claudio Mandonico's *Tre piccole danze* (which includes a Jazz song, a Waltz

song and a Children's song) and Massimo Priori's *Grottesche Visioni*. The concert also included music by Part, Weill, Stravinski, Piazzolla-Calandrelli and Bosso. **Holda Paoletti-Kampl**

Peter Di Bono played Monday 12/14/01, 11am to 1pm at The Crocker Galleria. Also, he was featured on Saturday, 12/22/01, 5pm to 7pm at Stonestown Galleria, 19th Av & Winston

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Mikes & More

Microphone Placement for Solo Accordionists

By G. Colcordi

Accordion designers, craft persons and manufacturers have, through many decades of efforts, achieved a remarkable balance in sound levels between the treble and bass sides of the accordion. One should keep in mind that this balance is what the audience hears, not necessarily what the player hears. Some players, such as myself, have unequal "ears" and do not hear a true balance while playing. The balance can be adjusted through reed block switches, use of single notes, harmony and chords, as well as staccato, semi-legato, legato, light touch, etc. to satisfy the player's ear. But it may be wrong for the audience. Moreover, most accordionists are "closet" players and do not play for an audience.

One example of defeating the balance I witness frequently at BAAC meetings—a microphone is used by the player to announce the selection with the free hand, i.e. the right. The mike is then left nearest the treble side or even moved down close to the keyboard! The treble shouts and the bass is overwhelmed and is barely heard. What a shame. A marvelous performance is degraded, which is why some listeners prefer an "acoustic" performance in order to avoid the distortions of mikes, amplifiers, speakers and mike misplacement—not to say the time-wasting of midi-setup.

The next time one of our ensembles plays for our meeting, listen! There you will hear one instrument, playing the bass and all the others playing soprano, contralto, alto, etc. It's beautiful and delightfully balanced. Thanks, Joe Smiell.

I do not claim to be an expert in this field and would welcome letters to the BAAC Page in rebuttal, defensive of amplification in small rooms or how you have experienced the acoustics of our beloved accordion in various venues. Please be constructive and offer suggestions as well as observations.

Smarty Cat



Accordionist and American Airlines flight attendant Mary Kay Doktorski was a winner in the 2002 Talent Search sponsored by *My Three Cats & Co.* Her photograph of Rocky, her pet Abyssinian, will be featured on a 2002 calendar, which can be purchased from *My Three Cats & Co.* Mary

Kay claimed that Rocky has a general affinity for accordion music and a special taste for Magnante arrangements. **Henry Doktorski**

Tom Torriglia performed solo on Saturday, December 8 from noon-3:00 p.m. in the Cannery's courtyard stage. He presented a program of what he called *Nataliano*—a mix of original and cover holiday tunes + Italiano-flavored favorites.

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The Three Suns Revisited

[Editor's Note: There's been some confusion about The Three Suns. Michael David Toth (who is developing a website devoted to them) wrote an article in Cool and Strange Music Magazine (#21 May-Aug 2001), which may help clear up matters. I've paraphrased, quoted and used part of the article and added with some additional material from the Internet.]

The Three Suns were brothers Morty and Al Nevins along with their cousin, Artie Dunn, performing as a trio. Al switched from violin



to guitar early on. They started in Washington, DC in the late 1930s, moved to the Adelphia Hotel in Philadelphia in 1939 and then the Circus lounge of the

Hotel Picadilly in New York in 1940, where a two-week engagement turned into a seven-year stay. Their first hit occurred in 1944, *Twilight Time* and they also did a cover version of the Harmonicats' *Peg O' My Heart*, which was nearly as successful.

The *Suns* was a concept as much as a group. Al Nevins dropped and added players to suit the material. In the late 1940s, the group was a quintet, with a rhythm guitar and bass. Their first big hit, *Twilight Time* was written by Morty Nevins and had over 3 million air plays, according to BMI. In 1951, they recorded as a quintet with Marty Gold on organ and Larry Green on piano. They also recorded as a quartet with Ray Bohr on pipe organ (and later, on *Swinging on a Star* with R&B sax legend King Curtis!). They were a sextet, a septet (with Billy Mure on second guitar), a combo of 13 (on *Perdido*, 1954), and later had full orchestral accompaniment. Al Nevins stopped performing in 1954 and concentrated on producing and publishing. Johnny Buck and later Joe Negri replaced him on guitar. Artie Dunn reformed the franchise for live performances in 1957 with Tony Lovello on accordion and Johnny Romano on guitar. Morty Nevins went into studio work as an arranger and composer, and Al Nevins formed a music publishing house, Aldon Music, with Don Kirshner and signed many young songwriters and placed over 200 songs on the Top 40 charts, including *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow* and *Up On The Roof* by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, *Breaking Up Is Hard To Do* by Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield, etc.

The *Three Suns* became considerably more experimental after Nevins formed Aldon Music. Al suffered a series of major heart attacks in the early 1960s that forced him into a reduced role and he concentrated more on ideas and delegating the physical work to others. Many of the later albums are credited to "Nevins, Kirschner Associates" and list no players. Al Nevins hired such arrangers as Sid Ramin, Marty Gold, Irwin Kostal and Roy Glover. He liked to toss in unusual instruments and sounds, such as the celesta, a theater pipe organ, castanets, vibes, a six-guitar combo and a musical saw. The best of the later albums were arranged by Charles Albertine. In the late 1960s, Morty Nevins revived *The Three Suns*, this time featuring Vinnie Bell on miscellaneous guitar paraphenalia and Fred Mendelsohn on organ for Musicor Records.

Regarding Charles Albertine—he was one of the unsung heroes of space age pop. A quick before-and-after-Albertine comparison of *The Three Suns*, Les and Larry Elgart, or Sammy Kaye provides a dramatic contrast—almost a reinvention of each group.

Albertine began playing piano at age 5 and was earning money giving lessons on the clarinet by the age of 9. He eventually mastered most of the major woodwind instruments, and was accepted into Juilliard after high school. He decided he didn't



belong in a formal setting and opted instead to play oboe in the pit band at Radio City Music Hall. He later switched to tenor sax and worked with a variety of dance bands, including Sammy Kaye in the late 1940s. Later, he spent a year in the pit band of the Broadway show, *Top Banana* before approaching Les Elgart to arrange for his newly-formed band in 1952. Although entirely self-taught, Albertine quickly became the lead arranger and a prime factor in the success of the Elgart sound, which kept one foot in traditional sweet swing and another in the more minor-keyed jazz of late bebop. Elgart and his brother and occasional partner, Larry, enthusiastically embraced Albertine's contributions. Albertine original *Bandstand Boogie* was adopted by Dick Clark as the theme for his long-running *American Bandstand*.

Albertine remained a freelancer and while working with the Elgarts began taking jobs from Al Nevins. Al was by that time a busy independent producer. Albertine arranged most of *The Three Suns* later albums during the RCA "Living Stereo" era, including the classic *Movin' and Groovin'*, *Fever and Smoke*, *Warm and Tender* and *On a Magic Carpet*. Most of these albums also featured one or two originals. He also began a collaboration with Sammy Kaye through the mid-1960s and he contributed occasional arrangements to Lawrence Welk's 1960s albums.

Albertine moved to Hollywood in 1964, where he worked on a few film scores, including the Viking epic, *The Long Ships*, but mostly he arranged and conducted incidental music for television series like *Hazel*, *Gidget*, *Grindl*, and *Days of Our Lives*. He eventually did a steady stream of television episodes like *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Bionic Woman*, and *Fantasy Island*, as well as specials. He wrote classical music, including a symphony and concert settings for poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay. He was fascinated by musical technology and enjoyed playing Bach and Mozart on a synthesizer.

For his article, Mr. Toth compiled and cross-referenced material from his own collection of records and memorabilia, along with interviews from members of the later touring live act, including Del Casher and accordionists Tony Lovello and Peter Selvaggio, plus arranger Sid Ramin—all still active.

Sid Ramin described the personalities of the three: Artie was quiet. Morty gregarious and essentially the comic of the group and Al was the one who stabilized things. Along with their big instrumental hit *Twilight Time* they recorded a number of hits for Majestic, Hit and Varsity records, then in 1949 they signed with RCA and stayed with them until Al Nevins' death in 1965. There was one post RCA album of new recordings of old *Suns* standards on Musicor. It involved studio personnel from the late RCA recordings, arranger Leroy Glover, with Morty Nevins, guitarist Vinnie Bell and Organist Fred Mendelsohn—they were identified on the album cover as *The Three Suns*.

As to their sound: the album liner notes on an early RCA album *Hands Across the Table: The Three Suns* describes it as follows: "Morty Nevins, the accordionist, says that the accordion takes the cross-figures and single note melody, which is easy to listen to, then Al (his brother on guitar) plays a steady, rotating, rolling beat, while Artie (on organ), is swinging an unusual kind of accompaniment against the melody and keeps up a sustained background." It was a distinctive sound for its day and it became very successful, spawning imitation groups like *Twilight Three* and the *Triads* (an early *Enoch Light* group with an uncredited Dick Hyman on organ). Most people described the *Suns'* sound as romantic, but for some people there was a gothic feeling, which may be why Hitchcock used a *Three Suns* off-screen radio performance in his film *Rope* to underscore the sinister middle section of the film.

After the group settled in at RCA, the record company began to "improve" their recordings bringing in arrangers Marty Gold and Sid Ramin. In the pre-RCA days the group worked out their own arrangements, but with more complicated charts, additional instruments and other musicians covering for accordion, organ and guitar, they were in a different era.

Sid Ramin said, "Al Nevins was a very dear friend. We were inseparable. It was a very special relationship, but he wasn't a great guitarist. He was the businessman of the group. He handled all the details about their contracts and bookings. But when they recorded (for RCA), they would hire guitarists like George Barnes to play, and it

was kind of funny, because George might do something on the recording that people would expect to hear when they heard the group in person. George was a tough act to follow."

Arranger Marty Gold also played organ on many of the mid-1950s recordings and Del Casher explains, "Artie Dunn was a great musician, performer and showman, one of the most talented, best sounding organists I've ever heard, and I really enjoyed working with him. But Artie couldn't read music. That meant that they had to have someone cover for Artie on organ parts for recordings. Artie could play anything once he heard it, but when you're in a recording session, you have to play it immediately."

Complex arrangements were the rule later when stereo came in and sounds were needed to "ping-pong" from one speaker to another. Also, the *Suns'* franchise was shifted to other types of music as the industry changed, like *Danny's Inferno* a reworking of Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" from the *Peer Gynt Suite*. Charles Albertine utilized an African xylophone, timpani and the jaw bone of an ass to dramatically underscore the rapid ping-pong of the melody carried by the accordion's bass on the right and the chromatic bongo and bass guitar on the left. The organ answers the melody, with bass guitar punctuation while the chains of the damned are dragged back and forth.

The *Three Suns'* road show used a number of different people, including Tony Lovello, Charles Magnante, Joe Vento and Peter Selvaggio, as mentioned in our last issue. Lovello says the live show "had no flash" and that he essentially changed it during his tenure by introducing energetic performing & repartee.

Del Casher joined the group on guitar in Los Angeles in 1958 and went on to perform with them in 1959 in Japan. He introduced the echo chamber and caused quite a stir. Casher made the arrangements for an album called *The Three Suns in Japan*, which was recorded in New York. Casher says, "It was a bizarre album for several reasons. It was Japanese children's folk songs that were jazzed up, and we put all sorts of bells and whistles and all kinds of wacky sounds on it. It was sort of like a *Three Suns* version of Esquivel. But the melodies were very pretty. Artie asked me to write the arrangements so that when we got to Japan we'd be able to play without a band backing us. So when we were in Las Vegas we'd work until 4:00 a.m. opposite Perez Prado and his band, and then I'd go home and sleep for a couple of hours and start writing arrangements." Casher headed for Japan in 1959 with Dunn, Dunn's wife vocalist Betty Brooks and Joe Vento, who assumed accordion duties after Lovello left.

At this point, Mr. Toth's article notes that: "Vento who is currently playing in Las Vegas, was with the group from 1959-1961. He later recorded two or three LPs for the Florida-based budget label Surf Side, of which, *Joe Vento Golden Hits Vol 1* is an astonishing, arcane *Three Suns* curio and [allegedly] a copyright violation case study. Along with one original song and a version of *Love Story* that dates the LP, Joe had the audacity to release as his own, exact RCA recordings of songs from *The Three Suns* albums. On his LP, Joe overdubs occasional, piano, organ and accordion noodling on top of recordings lifted straight from *Twilight Memories*, *Warm & Tender*, and *One Enchanted Evening*. To make it even more special, the cover art [imitates] the lettering and graphic scheme of Roger Williams' *Golden Hits* album. Needless to say, unlike Casher, Vento lacked the credentials to play on the studio sessions for the Japanese LP. Typical recording sessions were performed with all musicians together live with no overdubbing. Casher comments, 'You either knew how to play your part or you weren't invited back. You had to be a good sight-reader and play precisely with the rest of the band, otherwise you would slow down the sessions.'"

Given the album's style and the time of its recording, the Japan LP appears to have been arranged by Charles Albertine, the mastermind behind the most sophisticated, surreal and sought-after *Suns* LPs, including the aforementioned *Movin' N' Groovin'*, *A Ding Dong Dandy Christmans*, *Fun in the Sun*, and *Fever and Smoke*.

Before Albertine and a few years prior to winning a shared Oscar for their arrangements for *West Side Story*, Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal collaborated on arrangements released as "All Nevins and His Orchestra." Al increasingly became an idea man and worked with

arrangers. Morty and Artie didn't have any involvement with the orchestral arrangements. The later albums under *The Three Suns* name were really "Al Nevins and His Orchestra projects. The third of four solo Al Nevins projects was *Bon Voyage* in 1957. The songs were arranged to document a fictitious trip around the world with edited sound effects and tempo and stylistic changes within individual songs. Ramen told Mr. Toth, "That was done before people knew much about editing and overdubbing. Al was very daring. For example, if you wanted to use cupped brass immediately following open brass, he said 'Why can't we just record them in segments and splice them?' From Al's ideas Kostal and I did the arranging and if we came up with some added ideas, he trusted us to do whatever was right."

Mr. Toth concludes his excellent article, which I have partly paraphrased and quoted here with, "If anything connects the broad legacy of The Three Suns from the group's earliest roots to its final days, it was probably Al Nevin's sense of adventure. Al left in his wake diverse recordings, most of which defy classification as easy listening, jazz, rock or any other convenient genre. It was an unpredictable musical universe where accordions collide with beatnik bongos, guitars, ping-ponged through hell, and organs sleigh-rode through avalanches of bells and tubas."

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. NEW LOCATION!
1517 5th St., Berkeley Bring Accordion!
Info: (510) 548-2822

ACR Fun Band Practice:
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. 7PM.
1055 Escalon Ave.
Escalon, CA. Info: (209) 545-3603

ACR General Meeting:
3RD Mon. 7:30pm
Herman Sons Hall. 860 Western. Petaluma.
Info: 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, Colma/Daly City.
Confirm: Frank Montoro (650) 574-4757.

BAAC "Fun Band"
3rd Weds 7pm.
Moose Lodge, Colma/Daly City.
Confirm: Val Kieser (510) 531-4836.

Dues/BAAC PAGE correspondence:
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Bay Area Accordion Club
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San Francisco, CA 94131-8175
www.BAACCORDIONCLUB.ORG
Yearly dues: \$25; \$30 for families.

Stas (Continued from page 7)

by way of explanation: what always impressed me about Glenn Gould's playing was no matter how fast the tempo it was never rushed, forced or without spaciousness—and that's the *vocal* essence of music. I'm finding a spacious quality throughout Stas' playing now and it's thrilling to hear; I can only hope for its continued deepening and development as his repertoire expands. He's getting to the point where he only needs to focus and aspire to a certain kind of material (hopefully including his compositions) and make it his own, the way Gould did with Bach and Rubinstein did with Chopin.

McDowell's *Witches' Dance* is good, but *déjà vu* in a way; Stas is facile, fast, displaying controlled bellows shakes, blistering runs. It's the kind of piece he used to do in an appealing, if superficial way; however, even on something like this he shows maturity.

His Mozart is exceedingly good; clean, clear, impeccably done. *Twelve Variations on "Ah vous dirai—je Maman"* K300e (K.265) is based on what we call, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The melody and harmonic structure are simple and brief; it's not a theme as full of potential as Goldberg's aria or Paganini's Capriccio #24, because for the first three minutes it gets a little cloying. Mozart is too devoted to the melody of the piece—although that may have been his point: to display how many minute variations he could find in the tune. The work has the feel of showing off, rather than art. However, after the three minute mark it gets more complicated and interesting, gaining in contrapuntal density, perhaps glancing back over its shoulder towards Bach, but never reaching that level (or intending to, I'm sure). I think it was a minor work meant to *tinkle* the fancy of the children of the court. Stas gives it a brilliant reading. He seems to find the heart of each variation and reveal its voice with a perfect feel for Mozart; I think a devotee of Wolfgang's of any musical instrumental persuasion would find it convincing. The only comparison I will make is that in listening to Lips play Mozart's *Andante and Allegro Fur ein Orgelwerk in einer Uhr* (KV594), Lips misses the mark entirely—he has little feeling for Mozart and ignores the fact that the music is supposed to be from an organ in a clock. He blasted the piece as if he was playing a giant pipe organ in a gothic cathedral. Stas is a Mozart purist here and has far exceeded his teacher.

I find *Bayan and Beyond* by Dan Lawitts an exciting piece. The First movement is percussive and tense, seeking through chromatic runs and dissonance for some kind of center or hope. It's fleeing and fleeting—tension building, with a hint of Russian themes behind a curtain of modernist pretentious, yet melodic. Even the use of the bayan's air release is refreshing and not just a gimmick. This is a live recording and not without some minor flaws for not having been done in a controlled environment, but I think it's all the more exciting for being live. The chamber group is good, even if there's some bunching up of acoustics in the hall. I think Janet Millard did an excellent job pulling a complicated piece into an integrated experience and Stas is absolutely superb. The bayan soars above the orchestra without fear or reticence and takes its place as a clear solo instrument without a need for footnotes or excuses. I was thrilled and listened to it over and over. Lawitts has created a lovely vehicle for the instrument and for a player like Stas. The second movement, called *Tangoesque*, has a Piazzolla flavor, but an integrity all its own; homage without sycophancy & poignancy, too. Stas and the orchestra extend a Nuevo Tango feeling here and I don't mean to be hyperbolic, so tone it down; but by way of trying to make clear what I'm saying, the extension is analogous to the way Brahms extended the Beethoven *gestalt* with his First Symphony. The Third movement continues a Piazzolla feeling as a *Ballad*. It's reflective, a bit haunting, not as strong as the second movement, but the meditation is worthwhile. The Fourth movement returns to the percussive urgency of the First. Again, there is nice tympani and xylophone work playing against the bayan—this is a surprisingly good sound; it creates a sense of interplay and tension and the sharp percussive attacks make the bayan's plaintive qualities stand out, soar and consequently avoid the redundancy of so many compositions that try to fit a bayan/accordion into an orchestral setting and end up sounding like mush. This piece is direct, honest and forthright; sometimes it's in your face and sometimes it's poignant—it's not afraid to shout or weep. Even on the most elementary level I thought the concept of the suite was brilliant in orchestrating the mix of sounds and exploiting better than I've ever heard, the solo bayan playing with, against and soaring above an ensemble.

This is an excellent CD and a solid step ahead in Stas' development. It's completely satisfying in and of itself on every level and rife with the promise of things to come. I was impressed with Stas' greater maturity and depth; it's a quantum leap and I wholeheartedly recommend it.

The Patchwork Girl of Oz

Bob Smith, John (Kieser) and I attended a performance of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* at the Berkeley Fine Arts Cinema last Sunday. It featured accordionists "Max and Minka" and a third accordionist, A. Caroline Cooley of the band *Down River*. We were impressed with how the music was arranged to match what was going on in the film at any given time. The film, of course, was a comedy, filmed in 1914, more than 20 years before the *Wizard of Oz* that we all know, but all the characters were there plus some more.

Whenever someone fell over, jumped, or kicked or tossed something in the film, the music "crashed" at just the right moment, adding to the comedy. Bits and pieces of orchestral works that we were already familiar with were used to fit the theme in places to great effect. Other effects were also used that fit in nicely. It could not have been an easy task for these accordionists. The music was arranged by "Minka" (Jeanette Lewicki) with some editing by "Max" (Matthew Fass). The event was sponsored by Boaz Accordions. "All the other characters were there." I should have said "except Dorothy." There was no Dorothy.
Valerie Kieser.

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Lou Soper
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Whose Club Is It?

By Paul Allan Magistretti

It was suggested that I write this; I'm reluctantly doing so. I ask your patience.



I've edited BAAC PAGE since May of 2000. I was asked to do it by Lou Soper when the previous editor quit. It's a lot of work, but I like Lou and the club and nobody else wanted the job.

Lou is one of the Five Founding members and he wanted to open up the club's functions—the club had developed an exclusionary culture and he wanted to change it. The newsletter was part of the problem; it had the same format, design, nearly the same content and the same *de facto* editor for nine years. The website had a similar problem; it lay dormant for four years—not even the back issues of our newsletter were posted and even their existence in an electronic format had been destroyed.

Lou's terms were: the newsletter could be whatever I wanted; after all, it wasn't his field of expertise and he didn't recruit an editor to tell him what to do. It was under those terms that I accepted. His only stipulation was that the name should be BAAC PAGE; that's what the newsletter was named in the bylaws—the name was suggested by his late wife, Mary. It's a good name, short and catchy. The previous editors chose to ignore it. Reinstating the legal name necessitated a new banner, which John Seckman designed—and we were up and running without missing an issue.

Lou believed his role as President was to support others and step back. He wanted the club to be an open forum of accordion players and enthusiasts and to advance the cause of a fine instrument.

I joined BAAC in 1991 and I've never been involved with nicer people. However, over the years I've witnessed a curious phenomenon. While we have a great group, I've seen a lot of good people become alienated—as I'm becoming now. The people we lost didn't just slip away or join one of the emerging clubs; they caught a whiff of competitiveness and left. No one needs to be stressed by possessive and opinionated people when money, power and survival aren't at stake. BAAC is an accordion club; it should be a place where everyone relaxes, gets a swing at the ball and no one owns the game.

In the past, rules arose that strained the club's social fabric. "If you videotape you can't sit in front." There were two of us in the front row with cameras hidden by our bodies. Eddy Zaro was off to the side. Frank Schlotter usually sat next to me and taped audio with a recorder in his lap. We had to move. The videographer next to me, also named Paul, was a very nice guy (he gave free copies of his tapes to all performers); he quit the club. I stopped taping. Frank doesn't record anymore. "If you want to sell something at BAAC, pay \$5." That tossed cold water on what was an open marketplace at the time and added nothing to the club, except ill will. The Board never asks about making rules, either. Remember the vote to decide where the club should meet? We had two choices and the Board chose a place never mentioned. I was told the vote was "advisory and the Board had to move fast to get the Verdi Club." The members were never offered an explanation or apology—furthermore, elections in general have tended to be musical chairs.

I've been under increasing pressure since Lou finished his term. I was sent a guideline for editorial policy recently. Most of the things they ask for are already being done: document the meeting,

print club news, cover local events, have a calendar, publish a list of teachers, include who's playing where, etc. I've done that, plus unlike in the past, I've printed everything ever sent to me by a club officer or member & more. A previous editor was dismissive, claiming to be "a very ballsy editor who didn't print just anything a member sent in." I thought that editor's attitude was exactly what was killing the club. Another guideline: "There should be a BAAC member personality of the Month feature." Wake up! I did it a number of times. Members were profiled. It was intended to be a regular feature. The problem is to get people to cooperate—each article took more than a month, sometimes two. Also, I was turned down or ignored by writers & subjects. I'm thankful that Steve Mobia, Bob Berta and Dick Schiller came through and wrote nice articles featuring Eddie Zaro, Joe Smiell, Clyde Forsman, Vince Cirelli, Frank Lima, Kimric Smythe and others.

So, why do they issue a guideline to do what I'm already doing? The guideline is bogus. What a Board member(s) really wants is to limit the newsletter, as it was stated to me, "to local news, pictures and ads—period. Articles are to be about local issues and people. No historical articles unless about San Francisco. No national/international items. No long reviews or articles. No coverage of events other than listing the time and date, unless paid for as an ad."

They want to whittle the newsletter down to an absurdity. I've heard complaints from the Board about "too much Deiro material," but I've heard from several members who like it. Am I supposed to reflect the taste of one person (maybe two) on the Board? As the editor, I thought the Deiro material was interesting—after all, Guido & Pietro had San Francisco connections, the material offered an insight into the Golden Age and it was a human drama. Someone complained they had to look up a word I used and it pissed them off. So, along with a guideline, I should work from an approved word list—maybe check on each item. Can I do X? Y? How about Z, maestro? May I? Another complaint: Boaz has gotten too much coverage and "should pay for it." This stunned me. Boaz carries an ad every month, plus he is doing something for the accordion by creating and publicizing events in the area. Events—are news. News should be covered. I found this complaint mean-spirited, stupid or both. Did the *Harry Potter* producers pay for coverage on TV? Does Tom Cruise pay to go on Letterman's show? If other people want coverage, they should put on an event, publicize it and send out copy like Boaz does. Does Boaz have a vested interest in his events? Absolutely. America is a capitalistic society, but I don't think he intends to make millions. Anyone involved with the accordion is an idealist. Ask Gordon Piatanesi. On the other hand, Boaz reconditioned (gratis) Frank Schlotter's accordion for the Fun Band's top prize; he donated a stand and a case—pretty much the entire prize list, except for Val's back straps. Could his actions be a response to the newsletter's coverage? Shouldn't there be a greater accordion community that we're all in together? Or, is the world Us & Them? Pay up! Boaz has one of the few repair/dealerships in the country and the only walk-in teaching studio in the area—and he's under eighty. So, bitching about his coverage is mean-spirited, competitive and petty—all detrimental to what we need to further the accordion and our club.

When Tom Torriglia had his column I heard grumbling—he dared criticize BAAC. He *was* critical, but he was often funny. A number of people liked his column. Some Board members were miffed, "We shouldn't air our dirty laundry in public." First of all, we shouldn't have dirty laundry; more importantly, we shouldn't want to suppress opposing views—we should correct situations and/or contest our critic's errors. The newsletter shouldn't be our

governing body's "mirror, mirror on the wall." I wanted Tom's column to create a lively debate and make the club better—instead, there was sulking in the shadows, which may partly explain the guideline assault.

I've been criticized for "too much" material of/by/with Henry Doktorski. Henry created the country's preeminent website for the accordion. I've used his articles and he is using some of BAAC PAGE'S material. For example, I reprinted Tom Fabinski's interview with Peter Soave; the Chicago Accordion Club subsequently took notice and reprinted it. What's happening is—we're getting the word out! Isn't it obvious we have to reach out, include, inform and try to entertain, or we'll return to the closet? Other clubs have used BAAC PAGE'S material; I've used theirs. We're trying to build a network on behalf of the accordion and its artists. The Patio Español/Moose Lodge nexus is not the center of the world and the club doesn't belong to one person. BAAC was never intended to be a music school.

It has been said, "I defied the Board." This relates to the fact that in May and June I was told that funds were low and "I should cut the newsletter to 8 pages"; this would be a savings of \$100. I was told this when the issue was ready to go to the printer. Instead of redoing the layout, I'd rather pay a \$100. Lou Soper came to the rescue and donated \$100 and the issue came out as usual. The next month, Jim Holliday, one of the Founding Members, donated \$100 to keep the status quo. Instead of the then-Board being delighted by our members' generosity, I heard they were pissed. I had "been given an order and I didn't follow it." I thought I joined a club, not the army; the problem was \$100 and was solved—unless there was another agenda.

While the Board can pick an editor, I don't think it should control editorial policy; doing that would effectively remove it from scrutiny. Our members should have an advocate. Remember, the present officers while legal and upstanding, weren't elected by a vote of the entire membership; they were elected by acclamation and without opposition at a meeting that fifty people attended. I support them, but it seems to me that given the electoral circumstances they should be less aggressive about imposing their will. The entire club isn't one of our ensembles, although a dictatorial attitude may eventually reduce membership to a dozen people.

At the very least, the electoral circumstances did not establish a mandate from the membership to vacate bylaws, change back the newsletter's illegal name, demand redesigns, harass the editor (I've been called *embattled* and *besieged*; I heard the last Board meeting was mainly about the newsletter & "was heated" on the part of one or two members) and/or dismantle editorial policy. Whatever your opinion of Lou and his presidency, he was the last popularly elected officer we've had—he ran *against* the Board nominated slate. I respect our officers and I know not many members want to take on the job. Lou was the only one in recent memory who independently sought to serve the club and the members responded. I believe his independence motivated the vote against the handpicked slate; in fact, the rejection of the Board's candidate(s) was a comment on its increasing hubris & the Verdi switcheroo. Our officers are good, well-meaning people, but they're not *all* of the people.

But maybe the vast majority of our members hate the newsletter as presently constituted and would like a return to how it was. If so, they should have what they want. I won't edit it, because I don't believe it would serve our mission—I don't even think it properly serves our status as a non-profit, educational organization. Look, I love the accordion, but it wasn't until after I had taken lessons for ten years that heard of Galla-Rini and saw him play. It was a revelation. I left the concert and sat in my car and cried for what I'd missed. I worked hard on the newsletter, because I believed in what I was doing and I wanted to contribute to a greater cause. The things I personally wrote were difficult to

do and used up time and energy against with my own best interests. But I wanted people to be made aware of as many things as possible relating to the accordion—everyone is free to ignore the information, I just didn't want anyone consigned to ignorance by omission.

As I interpret the "guidelines," the NL content in the future would be: "Us playing for Us, listening to Us, writing about Us being Us—anything outside the club's purview would be excluded. The stupidity of this mindset is beyond comprehension. It must come from whomever complained that, "We raised the entrance charge from two to three dollars because of the newsletter." Our rent went up—there was a bogus energy surcharge of \$50—which hasn't been rescinded; remember, we had the big room for \$150 after we cancelled the Patio's food/bar fee. I don't think the Board has yet dealt with the outlay of that \$50/month—and BAAC should get a refund for some of the months it was paid. Instead, the powers-that-think-they-be choose to "crack down on the newsletter." Add it up: we have higher rent, a phony surcharge, insurance costs, better food—all things in general cost more—but it was the newsletter that drove up the door fee by a whole dollar and that extra buck is what is keeping people away. The newsletter's printing costs have been reduced and its budget compared to two years is less. I drive to SF from Novato every month to ensure these lower printing costs via a facility SF City College's Mission campus. Anyway, in a day when a movie costs \$9, someone has complained that they pay \$3, instead of \$2—for the fun, entertainment and food we put out. This idiot probably expects five-cent coffee and a house in San Francisco for \$5,000?

Bottom line: the newsletter doesn't belong to the Board; it belongs to the members—as does the club. The members should be asked what they want; they should speak up and decide, especially considering the Board's less than mandated electoral position. However, whatever the members decide regarding the newsletter, someone else can do it. I'm done being harassed. I'll do January's issue (if they want) & my adversarial colleague(s) can stuff it. The club had a newsletter that was informative, had broad appeal, was singled out by others as good and was on time—but that wasn't enough. The critic(s) couldn't/wouldn't do the job themselves, but he/they wanted to "control" what the newsletter should be and *command* the editor to turn it into—what would be in my opinion a stupid, unworthy endeavor. You would think there were plenty of things in need of improvement in the club to which genius could be applied other than the newsletter.

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Paul Allan Magistretti
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December, 2001

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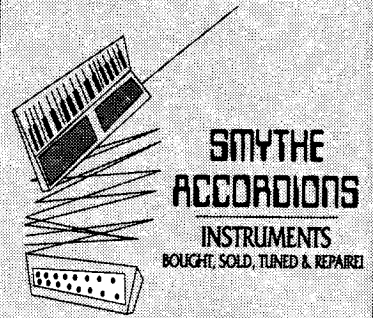
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(Submissions to BAAC PAGE are due 2 weeks after the 1st Wednesday of the month)

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