

# BAAC PAGE

Dedicated to the accordion and related instruments through fun, service & education

## SOME SURPRISES AT BAAC

By Val Kieser

### The 10th Anniversary Dinner-Dance

What does one do for a tenth anniversary celebration? Well, it depends on whose tenth anniversary it is! This one was BAAC's and was something really special. Just ask the founders—Rusty Bartoli, Jim Holliday, Dominic Palmisano, Lou Soper and Walter Traverso—each of whom had something to say about the club's humble beginnings and the role he played in the club's development, and each of whom was presented a special certificate and a free lifetime membership in recognition of his contribution in the founding of the club (except Lou Soper, who had already been awarded a free lifetime membership in 1993).

It was Walter Traverso who offered his house for the first get-together. Dominic Palmisano emphasized that fun was the dominant reason for his involvement in forming a club, along with finding some accordion buddies for his cousin Joey, whom many of you might remember. It was Dominic, with his new computer, who got the newsletter *BAAC PAGE* underway.

Rusty Bartoli tells us that all the work he did for the club—and it was a lot—was “a labor of love”. Jim Holliday had been looking for others who played the accordion. He says he hopes to see us all at another anniversary celebration ten years from now!

President Lou Soper talked about the club yesterday, today and tomorrow.

BAAC President Lou Soper presents certificates to co-founders Walter Traverso, Dominic Palmisano, Jim Holliday and Rusty Bartoli.



row. Some history of the club: The five founding members had all addressed the meeting of the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco, in an effort to get the accordion recognized as the official instrument of San Francisco. (It was Tom Torriglia who had succeeded in getting the item on the city agenda.) Following that meeting the five of them, who had not known each other before, got together in the home of Walter Traverso in Daly City. At Walter's home they decided to meet again the following month. Jim Holliday arranged to get a meeting room at *Woodlake Joe's* in San Mateo. Walter called several people and the first meeting, in May 1990, was attended by 27 people. So, they decided to meet again the following month, and at that time they voted to start a club. Lou Soper was elected President and Rae Lembi was elected Secretary. They devised a set of by-laws and named the newsletter *The BAAC*

*PAGE*. Dominic Palmisano drafted Josephine Hornbrook as Treasurer and volunteered to do the newsletter.

After the third month the club outgrew *Woodlake Joe's* and moved to the *House of Parties* in Daly City, charging \$1 admission since the hall cost \$32.50.

Lou mentioned that the founding of BAAC got others in other areas to start clubs as well. He stressed the

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## HISTORIC ACCORDION ON VIEW AUGUST 1st

Vince Cirelli has completed his restoration of Pietro Deiro's accordion and will bring it to our August meeting prior to its being shipped to Italy. Don't miss an opportunity to see this rare instrument.

# BAAC

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# WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

Our web site is up and operating (www.BAACcordionclub.com). John Seckman did a wonderful design—it's clean, clear and eye-catching with a brilliant & artistic use of color. Keynoted on the Home Page is the club's Mission statement as I interpreted it: "BAAC is dedicated to the enjoyment, promotion and support of the accordion and related instruments through fun, service and education." We can't go wrong with such an approach for it's the very concept that brought the Five Founders together and it's the idea that has allowed BAAC to have the success and impact it has had. Now, with our new web site we can reach the entire world and anyone in the world can reach us. We hope we can make a difference and that the interchange will be exciting, interesting and meaningful in terms of our goals.

Our Mission statement doesn't only apply to the web site, but holds true as well for the

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*Dedicated to the  
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& education*

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Newsletter and all of our club's endeavors. We need to provide fun, service and education in equal parts if the club is to survive and mean something. We always want our members to enjoy themselves and we're not going to take ourselves too seriously, but there is always a clear, meaningful purpose for BAAC. It's not just a social club, though sociability is abundant; it is after all a club with a purpose, a will and a direction. We hope more and more people, especially young people, will come to appreciate the accordion, will be drawn to join us and that our old members will continue & renew their energies to make

BAAC an even more meaningful organization—one that says something to the world about accordion music, the wonderful people who play & enjoy it and the instrument itself which speaks from the soul and opens the heart. We hope our members will be generous with their time & resources in helping BAAC reach out—for our doors are now open to the world.—PM

# AMBUSH AT THE BAAC CORRAL

By Jim Holliday

The first meeting following our tenth anniversary celebration was MC'd by Ed Massolo, who kindly took over the introduction of performers for the evening, using our brand new P.A. system recently purchased for the club with funds donated by nine club members. The entire program was taped by Ed Zaro, our cameraman par-excellence, using the brand new video camera give to him by the club to record our meetings. Ed has a collection of videos covering every meeting during the ten-year history of the club! [See related article.]

The first performer was Bruce Metras, a student of Steve Albini, making his first appearance at a BAAC get-together. As a very young man Bruce played the accordion for about four years and after a twenty-year lay-off, became interested in the accordion again, purchased a new accordion and began studying with Steve Albini. Considering that he has only been studying with Steve for six months he played at a surprisingly high level. He started with a number called *Tango Orquidea*, followed by *Perfidia*, and closed with a Latin number entitled, *Flores Negras*. We look forward to future performances by Bruce.

Val Kieser was our welcoming accordionist playing her button box while people were arriving before the meeting began and she later appeared on stage as our second performer, playing her piano accordion. Val had just returned from a vacation trip to Connecticut where she visited the Trapp family, familiar to American theater goers who saw the movie *The Sound of Music*. She began her program by playing one of the featured numbers from that movie, *Climb Every Mountain*. That was followed by a tango, *Jalousie* and a patriotic medley of *My Country 'Tis Of Thee* and *God Bless America*.

Next, was our Russian player, Alex Yaskin. Club members will remember seeing and hearing Alex play at previous meetings, because he has the unique style of playing while seated on his accordion case and providing his own drum rhythm beat by tapping his right heel against his accordion case as he plays. His instrument is a Russian three row button accordion, which he plays almost daily outdoors on Maiden Lane in Francisco. Alex plays accordion and guitar as a

*continued at top of next page*

professional musician. He did a beautiful job of entertaining us with a diverse repertoire beginning with a rock and roll number entitled, *Don't Be Cruel* followed by a Piazzolla tango composition, *Libertango*, and several other ragtime and reggae selections. Alex had a recent birthday on June 22 and became an American citizen on June 20. Congratulations, Alex, from all the members of BAAC.

Bob Smith came on next with *Ain't She Sweet*. His second selection was an intricate arrangement of *In A Persian Market* with all of the switch changes needed to conjure up visions of snake charmers, a caliph, beggars, a princess, a caravan and desert sands. He closed with *When You Wish Upon A Star*. This was an impressive performance, because Bob was called upon as a last minute volunteer to complete the first half of the evening's presentation.

After intermission, Jim Firpo reminisced about the early days of his accordion studies when he studied with a teacher who was also an accomplished composer of accordion tunes [Caesar Pezzolo]. Jim's program consisted of four compositions [three by Pezzolo]. His opening number was, *The Treasure Island Grand March*, apparently written about the time of the San Francisco World's Fair on Treasure Island, followed by *Ceserina* (a mazurka), *Ding* (a polka) and *Still Alarm* (a march) [the only non-Pezzolo piece according to Jim].

Another volunteer player, Roberto Rosa, beautifully played [two Italian] and two Latin tunes on an accordion borrowed on the spur of the moment: *Non Dimenticar*, *Anima Core* and *Noche De Ronda* and *El Lorito Brazilene*. That kept our feet

tapping! We're accustomed to being dazzled by Roberto's playing on his electronic accordion, but it was a delightful surprise to see that he was equally as effective in "knocking us out" using a borrowed acoustic accordion!

Lou Soper was the final performer of the evening and was planning to do a demonstration of an accordionist's development from student to advanced player. As a child student of the accordion, Lou personally started out by listening to performers on the radio and by playing tunes with only single notes, then two notes and eventually triads and complex extended chords. Lou's presentation was proceeding on a serious and high level when suddenly the tone changed from the sublime to total chaos! At this point, without warning, BAAC's own version of the old Sinatra Rat Pack charged in from stage left.

BAAC members, who recall Sinatra's Las Vegas Rat Pack, consisting of Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Peter Lawford and Joey Bishop as "partners in chaos," famous for "crashing" top-notch acts at other Vegas casinos, will be pleased to know that BAAC has Peter Di Bono, Jim Hillman and Don Nurisso carrying on the old Sinatra tradition in our own group!

With accordions blaring, all three "roared in" playing *Satin Doll* and surrounded Lou on center stage. Lou immediately ditched any thoughts of continuing his own planned program and became the fourth member of the "BAAC Pack." The group then finished out of the evening's entertainment playing *Honeysuckle Rose*, *On A Clear Day* and *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Talk about a show ending with a "Big Finish." WOW!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Make a note about September's Meeting: starting in September, we are changing our meeting night at Patio Español from Tuesday to Wednesday. Thus, the Sept. meeting will be Wed. Sept. 6th. There are several reasons for this. First, Raul the General Manager of Patio Español has had to drive from Santa Rosa to open the club for us (which he did as a courtesy); it is normally dark on Tuesdays. Because of this situation and a mix-up we were nearly locked out of our July meeting. We want to keep this beautiful facility for our meetings, so this is the best way to go. More importantly, the move will save us \$60 on the cost of rent and the presence of the public in general may add to the club's visibility and attract new members—mainly, we need fear no near lock-outs in the future.

August's meeting remains unchanged: Tuesday Aug. 1st. At that time we will nominate two Board Members and a Secretary. So, if you would like to serve BAAC in one of these positions, please call our Secretary, Val Kieser at (510) 531-4836. Nominations will also be made at the meeting.

Plans are in full swing for our picnic on Saturday, August 12th at Nature Friends Park in the Oakland Hills. We're going to have a wonderful affair with prizes, great music, dancing—there will be BBQ chicken, hot dogs & watermelon. See the insert for details.

We now have a new PA system, which was used for the July meeting and it is super. Eleven of our members (two added to the pot) contributed \$1,000. We are still seeking an additional \$500 to add to the system. Then, we will

have a sound system second to none. Remember, this is your club and we're only as good as you make us. Any donations to BAAC are fully tax deductible. Please help, if you can.

Our brand new 10th Year Anniversary T-shirts are finished & on sale; they're beautiful and sell for \$15.

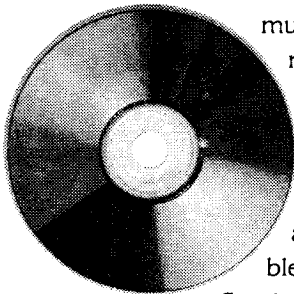
The most exciting addition to BAAC is our new web site (noted elsewhere). If you have a computer, take a look. If you don't, find a friend, a store, a library—go anywhere and take a look—you will see what a monumental tool for furthering the aims of the club we have created: we're at [www.BAACcordionclub.org](http://www.BAACcordionclub.org). You'll love it.

See you at Patio Español Tuesday, August 1st. It'll be another great meeting; don't miss it! —Lou Soper.

# TANGLED LIES BY PARLANDO

A CD Review by Paul A. Magistretti

About five years ago Dale Meyer, a BAAC member, heard Astor Piazzolla and something clicked. He began to explore Nuevo Tango's possibilities by forming a group and playing the music. He surrounded himself with excellent musicians and tried to use an old



musette piano accordion for the bandoneon part. The work was good, but the musette sound wasn't right. Dale then found an orphaned bandoneon (not easy to do five years ago); it was runty and not sonically blessed, but at least it was in the zone.

Starting from zero he began to tame the contrary thing, or at least find where the notes were on the world's most cryptic of accordions. Over time he improved and strengthened his playing and has since graduated to a new Premier.

All along Dale's ambition wasn't to just play Piazzolla—but to compose. After all, there is a certain futility in playing Piazzolla's works, because the *maestro* himself is everywhere present on CDs and plays his own work only too well. Dale wanted to do more, for what had inspired him was not just specific Piazzolla tangos, but the sound, the beat, the *gestalt* of Nuevo Tango—he wanted to develop compositions within a tango context, but from his own perspective.

Now, with this CD *Tangled Lies*, Dale presents *Parlando* (a sextette) in nine original compositions ranging from thumping tangos to melodic milongas. The six musicians are talented players with lengthy resumes and as *Parlando* they're not just talking (*parlando* in Italian), they're *cooking*.

The CD is a live in-studio recording, all acoustic instruments, and it has a great feeling to it. Everyone was bouncing off each other and in spirit it reminded me of Piazzolla's *Tango Zero Hour*. Everyone was hot: Mark Wyman's pounding piano, Katrina Wreede's soaring viola, Su Jacobsen's heartfelt violin, Mike Silverman's throbbing bass (plus an excellent solo), Paul Binkley's solid guitar solos and Dale setting the tone and weaving his way through the ensemble. It's a solid group performance and the numbers are worthy lights in a *Nuevo Mundo*. My only wish is that in mixing the bandoneon's part had been cranked up a few db.

If you put aside preconceptions of Piazzolla and listen to these compositions, they're really excellent. Also, unlike a lot of CDs, even some of Piazzolla's, there is a continuous rising arc of emotional satisfaction. Dale's music stuck with me long after it

was over. Mental excerpts and medleys followed me throughout the day—and in the best sense of when that happens.

For example: *Esta noche* blends a poignant theme with a pulsating B section and an extended piano solo eventually folding back to the theme and it's lovely. It's sort of exemplary of the multi-movement structure Dale uses; he takes you on a trip and makes you feel like you've been somewhere emotionally.

Let me run by some of the other selections: *Accordion to Parlando* starts like a marching tango, then the B part eases into a wistful milonga with Katrina's viola lamenting—thence, back into the march and a pulsating piano solo ending with a pounding tutti section and an abrupt glissando. You see? It's a journey.

*Malik's Garden* (movements 1 & 2) opens with a meditative bandoneon solo that wanders a bit, then develops a series of chords with the bass viol emerging briefly before we start into a slow, heavy downbeat tango and a haunting bandoneon theme that repeats and eventually ends on two poignant notes.

*The Snows of Yesteryear* is a lovely milonga (my favorite) that floats with nostalgia and loss; it almost has a fifties pop tune feeling (in the good sense). Here Mike Silverman has a nice bowed solo on the bass that fits the mood perfectly.

*Dance of the Astronauts* is a sci-fi tango and after a few intro bars, we get a space-like effect with the instruments wandering without a beat until they free float together and fuse like Ravel's *Bolero*—only to un-Ravel again with

the bowed bass squeaking distracted cadences until it finds a thread of the most basic tango beat possible while the other instruments *zero gravity* around it. Then, a tango emerges out of the chaos and the guitar starts to speak giving us a sense of jazz as *Mission Control* and settling down until a burst of final arpeggios.

*Heaven* starts by reminding me of *Cry Me A River* for some reason with a 4/4 intro before the tango starts, which leads us into its heart, which is carried by the piano's trills and double octaves teasing the melody. Finally, the viola comes in to restate things and center us in a sense of longing and pathos until the final movement eases us away with a bass glissando.

There's much more here and the music really establishes its own voice. If you can escape the Piazzolla template and relax preconceptions the rewards are great. Dale is well on his way to finding his own *Nuevo Tango* voice and it could be an important one. How nice it is to have followed him along the way as one of our own. You can contact him at [www.parlando.com](http://www.parlando.com), or call him at (650) 794-0727 to order the CD. I know he'd appreciate the support from fellow BAAC members.

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*They're not just talking (parlando in Italian), they're cooking.*

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# NATIONAL ACCORDION AWARENESS MONTH 2000

by Tom Torriglia

*National Accordion Awareness Month* (NAAM) 2000 was huge success this year. For the second year in a row, I was helped by the enormously successful Free Reed Festival ([rootsworld.com](http://rootsworld.com)). The Free Reed Festival was an online event that featured a variety of accordion-based entertainment every day during the month of June. The festival got national exposure via interviews it did on stations including NPR. I did one nationally broadcast interview and about 20 radio interviews with small-market stations across the U.S. and Canada. I think next year I will change the name to *International Accordion Awareness Month*.

To celebrate NAAM in the Bay Area, my company *All Things Accordion*, in association with the historic Cannery at Fisherman's Wharf put on Day of the Accordion-San Francisco. This fun-filled event was held on Sunday, June 18, but actually began coming together months before. In March, I got together with Holly Krassner, the Marketing Director for the Cannery, and her assistant Liz. We discussed the scope of the event, which included what day to do it. Last year, the festival was scheduled the same day as the Pride parade and also during the "X" games. Needless to say, the accordion festival was not on the top of everyone's list of events to attend. We settled on Sunday, June 18. We knew the week before the 18th was the North Beach Festival and the week after was the Pride parade. So, the 18th it was. Wait! That's Father's Day. Dilemma? No, not for PR whizzes like Holly, Liz and myself. We put our spinmeister hats on and went to town. We decided coming to an accordion festival is just what Dad has always wanted to do on Father's Day. To sweeten the enticement to attend, we decided to raffle off some ties (of course) with accordions on them (The accordion ties were donated by Squeezinart). The money from the raffle would go to our favorite charity, *Music in Schools Today* (a non profit that raises funds and awareness about the need for school music programs in the Bay Area ([mustcreate.org](http://mustcreate.org))).

And finally, the entertainment. Our first plan was to have three bands perform and have the first hour open for as many people as possible to come and do a song or two gratis (Holly's idea). With the financial assistance of the Cannery and the Bay Area Accordion Club (thank you for your donation!) we were able to put together a small budget.

So with a budget and a plan I went about booking the festival. A call to bellows was placed in the BAAC newsletter asking that if anyone wanted to come and do a song during the first hour to call and let me know. No one contacted me. This seemed quite odd. Accordion players, accordion festival, chance to do a song or two. Nothing. Not one call.

So for the first hour, it was plan B—try to get a little more money from the Cannery and hire some entertainment. We got an incredible return on our money as you'll read below. It was then up to me to try to entice some very good bands to come and play for a lot less than what they normally charge. And the accordion community said YES! Big thank yous to all the bands.

Once the roster was set, it was time to get the publicity machine up and running. Overall, the publicity effort was very strong and we got a lot of good press for the event. With Holly's contacts at the *S.F. Chronicle* and with a good pitch effort on my part, I was able to get some interest from them about the event. The result was a huge article and an even huger picture on the Friday before the event (there's a link to the article at [ladyofspain.com](http://ladyofspain.com)). I made personal appearances at both KFOG and KFRC and the Saturday Daily Datebook (June 17) ran a photo and listing of the Squeegees' appearance that night at the Hi-Ball Lounge and the event itself. Post-event publicity included a news clip on KGO TV at 5, 6 and 11. The Cannery also did a huge mailing of announcement cards.

Finally, the big day came. The event was to start at 1:00 p.m. By noon, the sun was peaking through and the courtyard was filled. After I made all the initial hellos and thanks for comings, I turned the stage over to Lou Soper and his trio. By the second song Lou had the crowd into it and I knew the day was going to be a success. This trio was soooo smooth and polished. It was just a treat to see such real pros.

Next up was Conjunto Romero, a new band that played a crowd-pleasing blend traditional Tejano and Conjunto music. (They shared the bill with the Squeegees the night before and just rocked the Hi-Ball with Tex-Mex polkas). These two bands really stepped up during the first hour and set the tone for the whole day. Special thanks to Lou and button accordionist Val Romero.

By 2:00 p.m. the sun was shining through as Baguette Quartette, featuring the accomplished Odile Lavault on accordion, took the stage. Their musette music, their look and all created a relaxing, whimsical atmosphere. Maybe it was the combination of the sweet music wafting through the air, the sun, the courtyard and the trees—it was just magnifique!

Then, it was Squeegee time. Yippee! Let's polka and then—let's polka some more. The Squeegees included myself and Ruth Peckham on accordion, Carole Borelli (Ron's sister) on lead vocals and tuba and drums. We whipped the crowd into a manic frenzy (well, maybe not quite manic, but people were clapping along) and people were dancing and singing and stomping their feet and standing and cheering at the top of their lungs (well, maybe not quite at the top of their lungs but almost, kinda). Phew! What a set.

Last up was Motordude Zydeco which featured Billy Wilson on the zydeccordion and Art Peterson on a P.A. They put together a closing, kick-ass set of fun music that had people dancing and singing long after they had finished playing.

After I said the final thank yous to the bands and the fans, I walked over to Holly and asked, "So?" She replied, "So."

We hope to see all of you again next June for *Day of the Accordion* at the Cannery.

# THE UNSUNG HERO GETS A SONG

by Bob Berta

Eddie, the hero of our story, is a sprightly paesano who is ninety-two years young. He grew up in San Francisco and after school labored in a meat market his entire working life. At the onset World War II he developed an interest in electronics. The world was aflame and the war, the century's most compelling event, was being experienced nightly on radio. He subsequently dipped into all varieties of electronics from Ham radio to recording. For

a while he toyed with the idea of finding a career linked to the air waves, but his job was a good deal and comfortable and so he remained. Ah, but when not at work he delved into the world of recording and focused on accordionists with whatever technology was available—in the early days that meant using a lathe style machine and cutting discs. Right after the war wire recorders appeared and later tape and Eddie moved right along with the times. When video appeared he jumped in and has stayed with it ever since. Eddie's archive is comprised of an impressive audio/visual collection covering the San Francisco Bay Area accordion scene and includes many of our legendary performers. A mere listing of some of the gems would make any aficionado salivate. But as Kipling said, "That sahib, is another story."

In any club there are a few heroes who avoid the limelight and often go unsung. They remain at the edges of our perception doing what they do, patiently, persistently and unstintingly, providing some important and often overlooked service. Such a man is Eddie Zaro.

If you don't know who Eddie is you will say "Aha!" the moment I remind you he is the man behind the video camera who has quietly recorded our club meetings for the entire ten years of its existence. He's BAAC's unsung and unnoticed club historian *par excellence*—our Herodotus, our witness, our savior of time and space!

Most of us are familiar with the book called *The Golden Age of the Accordion*. Let me go out on a limb, I think we are presently in a second Golden Age of the Accordion and Eddie is keeping that record for us in sound and pictures. This quiet, unassuming man has gone about preserving what most of us have merely waltzed through. In ten years he's hardly missed a meeting—he has caught each twitch, wrong note and triumph



Ed Zaro Receives a new camera in appreciation for his work.

of every performer and even sneaked a peek at the audience. Had too much to drink in 1993? Smile, you may be on tape. Eddie is aesthetic democracy in action, because it never mattered to him whether you were a beginner, a rusty, reformed non-player, or a world famous artist interpreting Bach, he was there to capture what you did with a sympathetic and unfailing eye.

So, it all adds up to a mighty collection of many wonderful and historic moments. For along with recording our talented members, he captured the many World Class players BAAC has hosted: some of the best players who have ever played the

accordion. Some greats are no longer living, but due to the dedication and spirit of Eddie, they live on. Just think, Jim Boggio lives on for us, Robert Sattler was captured forever, John Molinari Jr., our dear friend, is still with us. Of living artists, we have a chance to view at will the likes of Lips, Szymenov, Sundqvist, Farnen, Ahvenainen. What a resource we have for young students for they can sit down and have examples of the world's best players at their behest. BAAC can say, "You want to see what this instrument can do, kid? Look

and be amazed!" We have a fabulous historic, artistic and educational resource and Eddie has provided it.

You may be surprised to know that Eddie does not play the accordion. He never had the chance to learn; he just loved its sound and what that sound did for his soul and wanted to capture that feeling for others. You can't ask for much more dedication to, if not love of, the accordion. How many of us take our enjoyment and never think of passing anything on?

So, let's stand up and take a breath and give this man his song—it's the wrong era, but I hear Joe Cocker singing, *You Are So Beautiful*.

If you're wondering where all those tapes are, Eddie has the entire library safely stored and catalogued and available for club use. When, God forbid, the Great Composer in the Sky calls him, the material becomes the property of the club, but let's say, "Cent'anni" (*one hundred years* in Italian). No, make it more than a hundred years & Eddie will tape every one.

In recognition for Eddie's outstanding service to BAAC the Board of Directors awarded him a lifetime membership and out of consideration for his poor (but trusty) RCA camcorder, secured for him a new camera with the help and kindness of one of our members, C. J. Raja.

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*Some greats are no longer living, but due to the dedication and spirit of Eddie, they live on.*

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# TRAPP FAMILY LODGE: A SPECIAL VISIT

By Valerie Kieser

I'm sure many of you have heard of the beautiful Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe, Vermont. It is one of our favorite places to visit, and we go every couple of years or so.

But this past visit, in June, was extra special: I asked for, and was very kindly granted, a personal visit with the living Maria von Trapp, who happens to be the accordionist of the musical



Trapp family. This Maria von Trapp is the third of seven children of the first marriage of Baron Georg von Trapp whose first wife, Agathe, passed away while still quite young. The musical *The Sound of Music* was written around the life of the other Maria von Trapp, who was the second wife of the Baron. Together they had three more children, for a total of ten children in the singing Trapp Family. The names and ages of the Trapp children in the musical are quite different from those of the actual family, but the number of children is accurate.

John and I had a wonderful two-hour visit with the very gracious Maria von Trapp in her living room. She played her piano accordion and sang and yodeled for us, I played some accordion and some button box for her, and we played a few numbers together. We also did a lot of talking. I told her of our accordion clubs and the ACE ensemble, and she told us a bit about life as part of the traveling musical family (it was not

easy). Maria tried to teach me one of her beautiful Landlers but, alas, after all this time I can no longer remember how it goes, and it is not written down in notes. (If only our Joe Smiell had been there—he could have written it down right on the spot!)

Many of my friends know that, back in the 50's, I bought every recording I could find of the original Trapp Family Singers, so I was very familiar with their gor-

geous music, and somewhat familiar with their family story, even before I knew a musical was being made! Their music is so pure, and with such incredibly beautiful harmony (exactly what I love), that I was an instant and faithful fan from the beginning. Imagine how exciting it was for me to have a meeting with Maria!

So, to date I have met three of the 6 living "children" of the Trapp family: Maria, Rosmarie, and Johannes. Rosmarie directs the twice-weekly Singalong at the Lodge; and Johannes, the youngest of the "children" and the only one who is younger than we are, runs the business. All three of them live at or very near the Trapp Family Lodge. Others also live fairly close by, but I haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting them.

Needless to say, I am already dreaming about our next trip back to Vermont!

## TEACH SPEAK

*Each month we will be printing tips from accordion teachers & others that we hope will be of interest to our readers. We invite everyone to submit any short piece of advice. This month's tip comes from an anonymous e-mail, but we thought it was good. If you have things to add or contradictions to express, please address them to the editor.*

An important physical factor to consider when you play is to keep your right arm relaxed—relaxed from the shoulder to the fingertips. A particular site of tension is the wrist and the large muscle in the palm surrounding the thumb. In fact, when players miss notes in performance that were nailed in practice it is usually due to tension in the wrist and palm (brought on by nerves). You can't control being nervous, but you can focus on relaxing your palm and wrist. If you do so in practice, it may become a habit that won't desert you when the pressure's on.

**Would You Like to Join BAAC?**

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videotaping all our BAAC meetings, using an old but functional VHS camera. Ed is so much associated with videotaping that I automatically duck every time I see him (with or without camera!) Ed said he doesn't play, but loves the accordion. He surely has demonstrated his devotion and loyalty to BAAC, and today the club was able to show its appreciation in a concrete way.

Add to the above a delicious dinner and wonderful dance music of Steve Balich's band (don't you just love to watch Ed and Isabelle Massolo dance? They are superb!), and you have one very memorable evening!

importance of reaching out to youngsters in particular. BAAC is sending out packets about BAAC to cities throughout the Bay Area, including offers to provide players for events.

John Seckman, our Webmaster and the layout editor of *BAAC PAGE*, talked about our web site, its status and its plans to expand.

Lou then presented a well-deserved certificate of special recognition and gratitude, along with a free lifetime membership, to a surprised and delighted Vince Cirelli. A similar certificate, along with a lifetime membership, was prepared for Joe Smiell, who unfortunately was out of town and unable to receive it at this time.

To top off the evening, Lou Soper, on behalf of BAAC, presented to Ed Zaro, our Club Historian, a brand new video camera, donated to BAAC by member (and student of Lou Soper) C. M. Raja of *Camera Boutique* in San Francisco. Ed was floored! For all these years he has been faithfully



Members check out 10 years of photographs from club events

## ABSOLUTELY ACCORDION

**Stas Venglevski & Mike Alongi will play for BAAC on November 8th.**

The duo will present the purest accordion ever heard: original French Musette tunes so melodic you'll want to learn them. Plus, you'll hear old favorites interpreted by the best traditional duet in the world. From the first notes you'll know this is the sound, the music, the artistry that only the accordion can achieve, touching the heart as no other instrument can. Don't miss this it!

## Get your Cotati Tickets Now

If you are planning to attend the Cotati  
Accordion Festival, you can purchase your  
tickets in advance

from BAAC. One  
day admission  
is \$10, and  
tickets for  
both days  
are only \$18.





# Calendar of Events

## July

- 23-27 Galla-Rini Accordion Camp  
Oceanside, CA. Call Kjell Holmes (858) 453-5486
- 29 Accordion Club of the Redwoods Annual Picnic  
Penngrove Community Park, CA.  
Music: 10:00am-5:00p.  
Food Served: Noon-2:00pm  
\$10.00 Adult / \$5.00 Kids under 12 years old  
Reservations by: July 21st  
Info: John Pordon (707) 935-7334

## August

- 1 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7:00pm**  
Joe Smiell & Frank Montoro perform  
Patio Español, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco  
Info: (510) 792-8765
- 6-10 Las Vegas International Accordion Convention  
Plaza Hotel & Convention Center. Las Vegas, NV.  
Phone 801-486-1695 or visit the web site online  
at [www.accordioninfo.com/convention](http://www.accordioninfo.com/convention)
- 8 Golden State Accordion Club. General Meeting  
Pietro's #2, 679 Merchant, Vacaville, 7:00pm  
Info: (707) 864-2359  
<http://direct.at/GOLDENSTATEACCORDIONCLUB>
- 9 Good Time Accordion Club General Meeting  
Escalon Community Center, 7:00pm  
1055 Escalon Ave. Escalon, CA.  
Info: (209) 545-3603
- 10 East Bay Accordion Circle, 7:30pm  
1542 Grant St. Berkeley  
In the cottage behind the main house  
Bring Your Accordion!  
Info: (510) 548-2822
- 12 **BAAC Summer Picnic, 10:00am**  
Nature Friends  
3115 Butters Dr., Oakland  
Musical games, Raffle with lots of prizes,  
accordion music and dancing  
BBQ: \$5.00 Info: (510) 792-8765  
<http://www.baaccordion.org>
- 14 ACR Board Meeting, 7:30pm  
Meetings open to members  
Herman Sons Hall, 860 Western, Petaluma  
Upstairs meeting room  
Info. contact Harry Cannata at: (707) 838-2859
- 19 Rose City Accordion Club Summer Picnic  
Dallas, OR.  
Info: (503) 697-7926
- 21 ACR General Meeting, 7:30pm  
(NEW LOCATION)  
Herman Sons Hall, 860 Western, Petaluma Info.  
contact Harry Cannata at: (707) 838-2859

## August (cont.)

- 26-27 10th International Accordion Festival  
La Placeta, Santa Barbara, CA.  
10:00am-7:00pm both days  
\$10 each day / \$18 both days  
Jam Tent / Workshops / Cajun Dance Party /  
Food Booths / Polka Dance Party and More!  
Info: (707) 664-0444  
Email: [info@cotatifest.com](mailto:info@cotatifest.com)  
Web site: <http://www.cotatifest.com/>

## September

- 2-4 Sam's Alpine Acres Jamboree & Campout  
Monroe, OR.  
Info: (541) 424-2282
- 6 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7:00pm**  
Our meetings are now on Wednesdays  
Patio Español, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco  
Info: (510) 792-8765
- 10-16 Joe Smiell's Intermediate & Advanced  
Button Box Camp  
Norden, CA.  
Info: (415) 832-6938
- 17 Oktoberfest & Kinderfest at Naturfreunde  
Music by Joe Smiell Bavarian Band.  
Info: (415) 388-9987

## Ongoing

- BAAC Ensemble**  
1st & 3rd Monday of each Month  
Moose Lodge, Daly City  
Contact Frank Montoro (650) 574-4757 for info
- BAAC Fun Band**  
4th Wednesday of each Month  
Moose Lodge, Daly City  
Contact Val Kieser (510) 531-4836 for info



# UNDERSTANDING THE BASSES

by Robert L. Smith

The bass system used on almost all piano accordions is usually not very well understood. The reason may be that most accordionists were never taught the details of what is commonly called the Stradella system. Why, Stradella? It could be from a town near Castelfidardo; if you know, please let us know. Standardization of the system was approved by the Accordion Teachers' Guild and the American Accordionists' Association on July 19, 1955, mostly as the result of the efforts of Anthony Galla-Rini—certainly an absolute wizard of Stradella's intricacies.

In a standard full sized accordion, there are five sets of reeds on the bass side: Bass, Tenor, Alto, Soprano, and Contralto. The accompanying diagram shows the pitch range of each set. The Bass begins at C two octaves below middle C; the Tenor at C, one octave below middle C; the Alto at middle C; & the Soprano, one octave above middle C.

The fifth set, the Contralto, covers nearly an octave, usually from F# to F, but F# to B are in the Tenor range and C to F are in the Alto range. This may sound confusing, but the Contralto manages to fool the ear, so that when you play a scale twice on the bass, it sounds like the pitch continues to rise. But when you reach the top of the octave, you are really back where you started, regardless of what you think. The Contralto is sometimes called the straddle set, since half of the reeds are in unison with the Tenor and the other half are in unison with the Alto. And no, Stradella does not mean straddle in Italian.

A full sized modern accordion should have at least seven bass switches; some have more, as many as nine or ten. Properly used, the bass switches can really enhance your playing. Often accordion sheet music is marked with symbols that correspond to switch settings, and, if you are lucky, your treble and bass switches will be marked accordingly. Now, look at the figure labeled Master Register. Each of the five dots represents one of the five sets of reeds. Bass reeds are represented by the lowest dot in the circle and the dots continue until the Soprano reeds are indicated by the dot at the top of the circle. The odd

dot that resides on the middle line and off to the right is the Contralto. All this should be obvious when you examine the accompanying diagram. Proper sheet music will indicate which switch to use; either the symbol will be shown, the name indicated, or both.

However, if your switches aren't marked, how do you tell which switch is which? Well, certainly you can listen and match tones with the treble side and switches. If your ears can't solve it, take your accordion to your teacher or technician and have him advise you. I always like to draw a diagram for customers when the switches aren't marked. I have indicated in the accompanying figure the actual pitch ranges for the treble reeds, along with the most common switches. If you want to figure out the bass switches and verify what is marked on your accordion, you can proceed as follows:

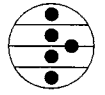
(1) The master bass switch is usually marked; i.e., a bump, depression, maybe a completely different type of bar. Check which switch gives the loudest, fullest sound. Verify the Contralto reed set by playing 2 scales up and down. You should be able to hear the fool-the-ear sensation of continually rising or descending scales.

(2) Next find the switch with the highest, purest single-tone. It's likely the Soprano. Verify it by setting the treble to Clarinet. While playing a C bass, play the C above middle C on the treble. Bass and treble should emit the same pitch. (There may be a slight difference if the accordion has a tone chamber).

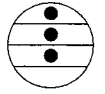
(3) Next, look for the Alto switch. It should sound one octave lower than the Soprano, but still have the Soprano as part of the sound, which is somewhat harder to detect than the Soprano by itself. Set the treble to Oboe (Piccolo + Clarinet), and play middle C and a C bass. Confirm: middle C is the sixth white key down from your chin.

(4) Next look for the Tenor-forte and the Tenor-piano switches. They will sound somewhat the same, but you should be able to detect some high soprano with the Tenor-forte. To duplicate the sound of the Tenor-piano use the treble's Bandoneon switch (Bassoon + Clarinet) and play middle C. The Tenor-forte can be approximated

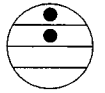
## Standard Treble Switches



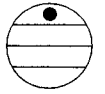
Master



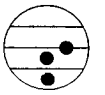
Tenor-Forte



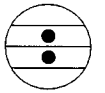
Alto



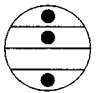
Soprano



Bass-Piano

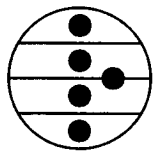


Tenor-Piano



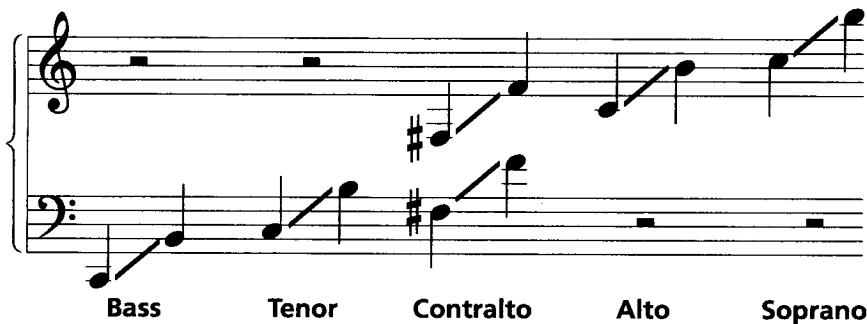
Bass-Alto

## Master Register



Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass  
Contralto

## Actual Pitch Ranges for Stradella Bass Reeds

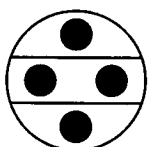


by using the same Bandoneon switch and playing middle C and C an octave higher together. This is not exactly the same as the Tenor-piano, since there are be two reeds at the same pitch on the treble side, but it should be close.

(5) Now, the Bass-piano switch. There should only be two switches that you haven't analyzed. Pick one and play a C major scale starting at C. One of the switches should sound more continuous as you play through the scale: that's the Bass-piano switch. The other switch should cause a sudden drop in pitch as you move from B to C.

(6) Finally, Bass-alto. Testing against the treble is tricky, since only part of the scale from the lowest bass reed can be duplicated on the treble. Use the Organ reed on the treble (Bassoon + Piccolo); play the lowest notes F through B with both hands. You have to ignore the highest sounds on the Bass-

### Master (Treble)



**Piccolo**  
**Clarinet Flute**  
**Bassoon**

alto switch; in fact, on my Petosa, the Soprano reed set is left off. This is actually a good

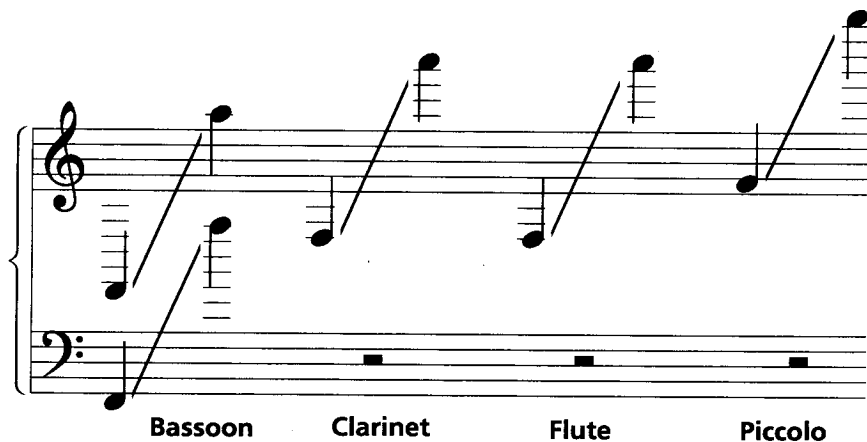
compromise, since it gives an additional possibility for using both the treble and bass for the same kind of tonality (i.e., an organ) and effectively increases the keyboard range.

At one of the Galli-Rini accordion camps, the Maestro said he uses the Bass-piano switch more than the Master switch on the bass, because the Master usually gives a muddy sound (too many reeds sounding simultaneously). The Master also can make the bass too loud and overwhelm the treble, which is especially true if you're playing a single note melody.

*Editor's note: Bob has written an interesting article to get us thinking about the physical nature of the bass and its relationship to the treble. We should follow it up in the future with discussions about the aesthetic relationship. We too often overlook the combination of timbres and how they interplay between the two sides of the instrument. We should think more carefully about combining tonalities and what we want to achieve in the overall aesthetic impact of any particular piece of music. Galla-Rini really mastered this aspect of the Stradella, but I feel too few take the time to appreciate his valuable insights. Players are always hitting treble switches, but we rarely see such consideration for the bass. The relationships that Bob has started us thinking about suggests that we should consider the total effect when switching one side or the other. Furthermore, basses not only have multiple sets of reeds, but a single button can unleash multiple notes. What about your air supply? Basses can be air guzzlers—how do you want your air rationed in terms of the expressiveness of the piece you're playing? Another question: what about Midi basses? I wonder if Tony Lovello's basses were always midi, thus saving all that air (and the energy needed to generate it) allowing him to achieve his terrific and extended bellows-shakes? Or, was it all brute strength? Maybe an acoustic player would be wise to choose the least air consuming switches (if aesthetically correct) when shaking. As for the Stradella question: my entry is that (perhaps) the town itself was named for Alessandro Stradella, a composer (1644-1682) who was noted for his innovative and beautiful instrumental accompaniment of vocal music—the eponymous bass system is an accompaniment of the treble's reeds (voci in Italian). Throughout the eighteenth century Stradella's name was a household word with eight operas being composed about his romantic exploits and eventual assassination (for running off with a Venetian noble's*

*betrotted)—an opera bearing his name as the title was written in 1844 by Flotow. So, the ragazzi in Castelfidardo may have said, "What do we call this beautiful bass machine that accompanies the voci of the fisarmonica?" Then, again, maybe not; what do you think?*

### Actual Pitch Ranges for Treble Reeds



### Standard Treble Switches



**Master**



**Bassoon**



**Bandoneon**



**Organ**



**Accordion**



**Harmonium**



**Violin**



**Musette**



**Clarinet**



**Oboe**



**Piccolo**

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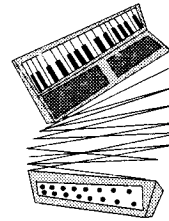
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