

NEWSLETTER OF THE
SAN FRANCISCO
**BAY AREA
ACCORDION CLUB**



November, 1993

November General Meeting

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

It started normally enough. Ten minutes before the meeting, it looked like a pretty good crowd. **Dominic P.** was worrying a bit about the program and some of the meeting details, but everybody else was standing around schmoozing with the friendly arrivals. Then suddenly **Veikko Ahvenainen** was setting up his tapes on a table. **Veikko???** At our meeting??

Yes, **Veikko**. And **Veikko** would play for us later in the evening, **Joe Smiell** told us when he arrived just before seven. **Marian** was making clucking noises about the lack of announcement in the newsletter and the numbers who might have come had they known. Then we all thought it was just as well...we only have so many chairs....it's nice to have occasional surprise guests.


Eventually, we all settled down and **Dominic** called the meeting to order.

Frank Montoro gave a quickie financial report – the Club has in two accounts a total of approx. \$8500.

Dominic opened the floor to a discussion of a new facility for our general meetings. That issue has been in the

forefront of the Board's agenda for almost two years, but no one has managed to come up with a suitable alternative to the House of Parties. **Dominic** believed it was time to involve more people in the hunt. He began by defining some of the important characteristics for a new BAAC facility:

- In or near San Francisco, within 10 or 15 miles of half our membership.
- Adequate parking
- Relatively safe neighborhood
- Somewhat larger than the House of Parties
- Bathrooms more subtly located
- Some extra space where people can talk during the meeting.
- Affordable rent (a vote showed general willingness to raise our door fee to \$2. to help pay for a more expensive location)
- Good acoustics
- Stage
- Plenty of chairs

A few site suggestions were made from the floor. A show of hands indicated a willingness to change our meeting night from Monday. **Dominic** encouraged everyone to keep the issue in mind and to let him hear any hot ideas. 

November 27 & 28th, Sat, Sun. Polka Fever Weekend, featuring.....**Joe Smiell**. Held at Swiss Park, 2001 Main Street, Chula Vista. (Off 5 at Chula Vista Main Street Exit. Go right then left thru gate into Swiss Park parking lot. Weekend package, \$35. Call Gene Swick (619) 452-0138 or Nancy Roussakis (619) 272-5190.

December 6, Monday. BAAC Christmas Meeting, 7 p.m. **Paul Pasquali** is driving in and will demonstrate his new midi.

December 8, Wednesday. BAAC Board Meeting, 7:30p.m. **Ed Massolo's** living room, 612 Lassen, So. San Francisco.

January 4th, Tuesday. BAAC General Meeting. Attention, attention!!! Please note change of date. The locale is changing, too. See little article on p. 3.

March 19, 1994. Texas Accordion Association Annual Convention, Plano Texas

Nov. Gen'l Mtng, from p.1

And then we came to the music. **Joe Smiell**, our Program Chairman, who had recruited the evening's musicians, also served as M.C. He first introduced **Joe Nanut**. **Joe** lives in Santa Cruz, so coming to meetings is quite a statement for him, and this was his first time playing for us. **Joe** and his great grin serenaded us with fine arrangements of "Autumn Leaves" and "Frank's Theme". Terrific, **Joe!** Please come back soon!



Joe Nanut

Joe Smiell then introduced his long-time buddy, **Ted Varga**, who has a pretty fine grin, too. **Ted** reminisced a bit, then launched into a couple of fine tunes, "Hot Pretzels" and "It's Polka Time!".

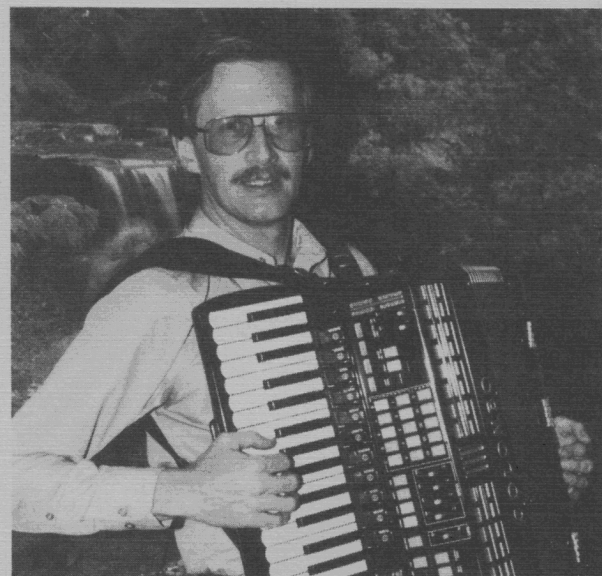
Rob Campanella came forward. Everybody felt as if they knew him well after **Paul Magistretti's** great mini-biography of **Ron** and his family in the last newsletter. **Ron** demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt how effectively he plays without recourse to electricity. He entertained us with two waltzes, "Reine de Musette" and "Bohemienne".

Then came two fellows who *do* need electricity. First **Bob Berta**, who

comes to lots of meetings but who had also not previously played for us, showed us what he does in his spare time. He arranges his favorite pieces for his midi accordion! **Bob** ably demonstrated his skills with lovely renditions of Albioni's "Adagio in G", of "La Rosita", and of the "Jolly Robbers' Overture" by von Suppé.

After intermission, we enjoyed **Frank Montoro's** midi and his arrangements of "Very Musette", "Cameron", "Sa Mhaeste L'accordeon", and the paso doble, "Bucaro". (Hope the spelling is right, Frank.) Frank has been enlarging his midi repertoire at a fantastic rate. He is leaning toward Latin numbers, and now after his trip with Esther to Canada, to French arrangements as well. They are real crowd pleasers, Frank. Keep up the fine work!

As a grand finale, we were treated to **Veikko's** marvelous talent, up close and personal, as it were. Everybody listened extremely intently. We were not disturbed by the usual hum of voices in the back because nobody wanted to talk. It was simply wonderfully quiet. **Veikko** began with his own composition, "Holiday for Bellows", featuring bellows shake throughout. (For any of us brave enough to play 3 minutes worth of bellows shake, we certainly would *end* the program with it rather than begin.) But **Veikko** appeared not to mind the left arm effort. He went on to play "Aria Figaro", "Home on the Range", Frosini's 1906 composition, "Operatic Rag", "Birch Tree Waltz", "North Storm" (his own composition), a Finnish/American polka, and finished with a big diverse medley of everything you ever wanted to hear. He played for



Bob Berta

about 45 minutes to several standing ovations and many shouts of "Hurrah", whistles and, of course, much applause. And of course, as somebody said, he didn't need electricity, either.

If you missed it, we're sorry. It was, as we said, a surprise to almost everyone there. Watch, though, for more of **Veikko** – he plans to return to the Bay Area in March and is talking about a concert. We'll keep you informed.

Josephine Hornbrook/MK



Veikko Ahvenainen



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NEW MEETING LOCATION

We are really moving right along! Dominic no sooner conducted the discussion about finding a new location at our last meeting than Frank Panacci has actually found one! It is part of the Daly City Parks and Rec Department, and is located at 285 Abbott Ave on the corner of East Moltke. The building is quite new, dedicated in 1989. It has one large room, an entry area, a big kitchen, and wonderful bathrooms! There is plenty of parking; the building has a parking lot, and more is available in the surrounding residential neighborhood.

Abbott Ave is a short street parallel to Mission, 3 blocks away. In relation to our present meeting location, it is on the other side of Mission and perhaps 1/2 mile south.

We plan to hold our January meeting in that new location to see how we like it and whether they like us. We must change our meeting date, since the building is not available on the first Monday. Therefore, our January meeting will be held on Tuesday evening, January 4th at 285 Abbott Ave, Daly City, 7:00 PM.

NEW BAAC TELEPHONE

Say, members, listen up! Or, tell us what you think! The Bay Area Accordion Club now has its own official telephone, courtesy of Administration Committee Chairman Algis Ratnikas and your Board of Directors.

The number is (415) 974-9210. It is a PacBell voice mail phone, meaning that there is no telephone instrument, but rather it is a message taking system offered by PacBell. This means that we need not be concerned about a permanent site for the phone, and that no one need install a new line to accommodate it.

The greeting message informs callers about what activities the Club is involved with in the immediate future, where and when General and Board meetings will be held, how to join, and services which we offer, etc., etc. Callers can leave any message they choose. A few members will have the access number and password necessary to record outgoing messages and check those incoming.

The Club will be listed in the San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose white pages. Cost is \$29/month. Call with your ideas, your suggestions, or your feedback.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ANTHONY GALLA-RINI

Our favorite Maestro will turn 90 years young in January. A gala celebration is planned for Saturday, January 15th, which Tony has invited all BAAC members to attend.

It will be held at CASA ITALIANA (the invitation says "St. Peter's Italian Church) located in Los Angeles at 1039 North Broadway. Come for cocktails at 5:00 P.M. Dinner begins at 6. The menu

includes Antipasto Salad, Pasta, Boneless Baked Double Breast of Chicken, Roasted Potatoes, Green Beans with Pimento, Spumoni Ice Cream with Birthday Cake, Coffee, and Wine served with dinner. Entertainment will be provided by Norman Panto, Randy Martin, Lou Fanucchi, and perhaps others. The cost, \$30. per person, will cover meals and lodging for the Tony and Dolly. No gifts, please.

This delightful sounding bash has been carefully planned by Sylvia Prior, who is accepting reservations until November 30th. So hurry and send your check to Sylvia. Her address is 14947 Vose Street, Van Nuys, CA 91405. Her phone is 818-994-1249.

BAAC Board Meeting

October 13, 1993

Synopsis

- The management of Festa Italiana, held last month at Pier 35 at which more than a dozen BAAC members entertained, has told us that, because of low attendance this year, there will be a delay in payment of our negotiated \$500 fee. Josephine Hornbrook will write a letter requesting payment within 30 days.
- We now have approx. 230 paid members. The general bank account holds \$5200; there is \$3420 in savings.
- Algis Ratnikas reported on the written surveys of potential committee helpers made at our two previous general meetings. He distributed to committee chairpersons the names of members who indicated an interest in helping on their committee. The response was excellent; we

all thank the membership for their cooperation.

- Algis reported that the Club can obtain a PacBell voice mail system for \$19.95/month. In this system, there is no actual telephone, removing the necessity to decide who handles it. It is a message box only. A Club spokesperson can leave a detailed message telling of meetings, membership, activities, which all incoming callers hear. Those calling can leave their own messages. A code will enable us to access and respond to incoming callers' messages. The Board agreed that this seems like a very workable solution to our visibility and communication problems, and asked Algis to proceed with obtaining the phone.

- Clifton Buck-Kauffman and Rebecca Browne, of the Cotati Accordion Festival, will be invited to attend our November Board Meeting to hear membership concerns about the Festival and to provide their own perspectives about running it.
- The issue of obtaining a sound system was postponed until we settle into a new and permanent facility for our general meetings.
- Each Board member agreed to investigate one or two potential locations for our general meetings and to report back to the Board at the November meeting.
- Board meeting dates will henceforth be held on the second Wednesday of each month at Frank Montoro's, 1448 Tarrytown, San Mateo. Guests are welcome to attend.

MK



Chef
Glenn Petrucci

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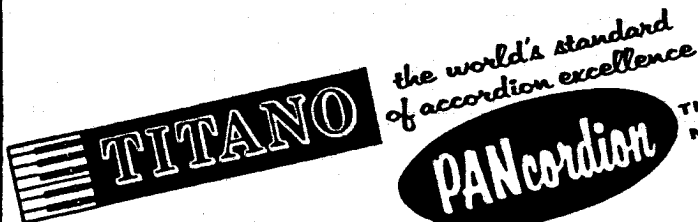
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CHRISTINE ROSSI: ACCORDEON DE CONCERT AND SOME IMAGINARY HISTORY

By Paul Magistretti

Hopefully, many BAAC'ers will recognize Christine Rossi's name, and a few more misguided souls might recognize the name of Maria Ouspenskaya. But it's doubtful that anyone will discern the connection between the two. The mystery of this often overlooked link unfolds in the following paragraphs.

One of my favorite actresses in 30's and 40's movies is Maria Ouspenskaya. She's a little gnome-like woman with beady eyes and a thick Slavic accent. You've seen her dozens of times. If I showed you a film clip, you'd say "Oh, yeah....her."

I have two vivid memories of Maria. One is in "The Wolf Man" (1941) where she plays a wise old gypsy who tells Lon Chaney, Jr. after he's been bitten by a mysterious canine that, "Even a man who is pure in heart/ And says his prayers by night? Can become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms/And the moon is shining bright." Pretty prophetic stuff and uttered long before the women's movement branded every man some kind of a bane. True to Maria's catchy rap, Lon develops hairy problems and eventually has to bite a silver bullet.

My second memory of Maria is in "King's Row" – a rather long, soapy film in which Ronald Reagan loses his legs and Betty Fields goes totally nuts. Maria, this time, plays an old woman (what else?), Madame Von Eln, who was a great concert pianist. The film suggests her playing made Liszt go home and break his fingers with a ball peen hammer.

Maria reminisces with two aging "young" leads about great art, "My dears, when I was a young girl all the crowned heads came to see me. And I played the piano faster and louder than anyone."

And thus the crux of the antithesis linking Christine and Maria.

How do you determine the world's greatest pianist? Whoever plays fastest and loudest? Art, at last, is quantified. We can put musical competitions on Wide, Wide World of Sports. "Let's see, Bob. Horowitz has done the Minute Waltz in a little under 42 seconds at 105 decibels; I think he's the one to beat going into the final round."

Unfortunately, Madame Van Eln's artistic view has infected far too many musicians, especially those of the accordion persuasion. We won't talk about rock and roll, because that would get into malformed sound waves and lives.

Let's delve into the instrument's past and see how it got hooked on Speed and Big Blow.

The accordion's dysfunctional childhood emerged in the nineteenth century, that great age of industrialization and mechanization. Soon after birth it found a non-identical, siamese twin on the left hand side: a rhythm machine. What a great idea! Maybe the whole thing is, ta-dah! A musical machine. Like those little boxes, or mechanical orchestras (see remnants of same at Musee' Mechanique at the Cliff House).

Moreover, the nineteenth century was impressed with power, speed, and industry. This was a long time ago, remember. England had an Empire and the US \$20 gold piece was worth \$20 (not \$500 and up, up, up). Industry and Empires worshipped the gods of repeatable tasks, uniformity, regularity, order, and compartmentalization.

Now, into this Imperial picture of rigidity comes the poor little accordion shackled to a rhythm machine, a quintessentially mechanical device that takes up half of its body. And people declared, "If it quacks like a machine,

it damned well better be a machine: order, precision, regularity." Thus, the tender bloom of musical expression for the instrument as a whole was overshadowed.

Well, given the death-like embrace of machine-being how could the poor creature (i.e. the accordion) express itself? What can machines do to prove their worth? They can go fast! Aha! Here's what we can do with the machine that has come to be called the accordion. We can go fast! Of course! This is its raison d'etre! And for those who can't find self-fulfillment in speed, there's volume! LOUD! Blast those eardrums until they beg for surrender.

Consider – one aspect of Maestro Gallarini's life work was just this: to separate the accordion as a musical instrument from the machine. His artistic mastering of the Stradella bass system was a heroic struggle by a consummate artist against the tyranny and limitations of a machine. He won the battle magnificently. Sure, there were other excellent players, and performers who transcended the accordion's mechanical origins, but none redefined the instrument the way Gallarini did. He transformed the rhythm machine into a free and independent keyboard. An amazing feat for any single artist to do on his instrument. (Anyone who has a chance to take Maestro Gallarini's master class on the Stradella bass system should run to do so, or buy the video.)

On the simplest level let me ask, "Is it possible to play too fast and soft?" Yes. But nobody does. Why? Doesn't a machine that's revving up – roar? If you're peaking 10,000 revs on the left hand, doesn't the right hand have to belch flames?

All of which brings me to Christine Rossi.



Christine Rossi, *Accordeon De Concert*, cont.

Christine Rossi obliterates Madame Von Eln's forked tongue measure of Art. She is everything that a machine is not. She's a superb artist who above all is a complete master of subtlety and fluency of the musical phrase. Her aspiration and expression are clearly vocally inspired.

An Italian tenor of years past, Tito Schipa, was famous for "spinning" a long string of notes, thus creating musical phrases which floated on the very breath he exhaled. Christine's similar effect comes from her beautiful breath (i.e. bellows) control in spinning out a musical phrase. Listening to her made me think of how the great cellist, Pablo Casals, used to teach his master classes. He told his students that all music was comprised of musical phrases that began, soared, and diminished in arcs like "rainbows." That was his exact expression to his students, "rainbows". And he would coach, coax, and inspire his student's sense of musical phrasing along those lines.

So, rainbows. Yes! Christine Rossi plays rainbows, continuous flowing musical phrases that open up and soar, but which always emanate from the emotional content and sense of the music itself.

In order to work her magic she has a wonderful pallet. Unlike our two color (fast and loud) *pittori*, she has an infinite number of hues from triple piano to triple forte with dozens of subtle gradations in between. Vladimir Horowitz prided himself on having seven separate and distinct levels of piano when he played. Christine Rossi has that kind of control throughout the dynamic range of her instrument, perfectly shading every note.

She begins her "Accordeon De Concert" CD with two Scarlatti sonatas. By the time you're listening to the second one you realize something about her playing. She looks for the soul of each piece

of music and finds it. She's emotionally engaged and every note is charged with feeling. There aren't any perfunctory, or meaningless phrases to fill the space and carry the piece along to its conclusion.

When she heads into the Bach-Busoni *Chaconne* her bayan is transformed into a large pipe organ, full of wind, power, and the throbbing, God-driven ecstasy of Bach. She explores Bach and the many complex moods of the piece much in the way Segovia did on the guitar. We can't compare artists (and few in history can compare with Segovia), but Rossi's bayan offers a kind of size and power that can't be duplicated on a guitar. I haven't often been moved to gloat chauvinistically about the accordion in this way - it was a new experience. Rossi has the ability to find the soul of a piece and become so expressively transparent herself that she disappears into it. She never imposes her personality; instead she is a vibrating spirit with unfailing sympathetic insight. She lets the music shine through her in a kind of sublime luminescence.

Rossi's fourth selection is Liszt's familiar *La Campanella*. It's beautifully rendered. What's more, you'd swear you were listening to an unaccompanied violin. She creates a kinesthetic blending of artist and instrument which transcends the sum of the parts and creates a new entity.

Maybe I'm onto something here. Let's think about the accordion. Maybe it's perceived limitations in the past were due to its complexity and the untapped range of its expressiveness. It was a sleeping giant. It hadn't appeared to have found its soul and revealed it for everyone to see. Maybe too few players exploited its vast imaginative dimensions. Maybe too many accordion players let a simple repertoire define the instrument: loud/fast polkas and marches, etc. Maybe some people saw it only as a folk instrument with a reedy, raspy out-of-tune sound that may endear or grate. Others may have looked at the piano

keyboard and saw it as a piano with lungs and banged, pushed, and beat out the notes. But the accordion has its own subtle, complex, chameleon-like and often elusive soul.

Astier's *Fantasia* in E Minor is a graceful, Paris Cafe type of piece, waltzy and emotional in a self-conscious, melancholy way. Rossi gives you a late hours cafe combo with clarinet and violin. It's late, they're a little drunk - not above such music, but still a little detached. I can't imagine, though, a more elegant and precise rendering of musical phrases than Rossi delivers, turning what could be trivial music into a haunting and bittersweet reverie.

Additional selections display a kaleidoscope of talent, technique, and empathy for the composing artist. Semjonow's *Kalina Krasnaja* is presented as a dramatic, every unfolding scene. Christine plays Wurthner's variation on *Dark Eyes* with the magnificence of a Gypsy orchestra. Each piece contributes its own unique magic.

I can't imagine a better group of performances than this one by Christine Rossi. And her selection of pieces is excellent. There isn't a loser in the batch. I even liked the ones I normally wouldn't like. Also, I believe the CD documents her performance repertoire for the Coupe Mondiale in 1987, as well as performances at Temi in Italy and Klingenthal, Germany, where she won first places. She's got these selections honed to a beautiful concert pitch. Rossi is a remarkable artist and only twenty-six years old; she lives and teaches in Monaco. Would that she'd come visit us.

Editor's Note: Christine Rossi's CD, *Accordeon de Concert*, is available at many Tower Records locations.

INTERESTED IN OR CURIOUS ABOUT MIDI??? Last call!

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 Bob Berta 4 Park Manor Dr. Daly City CA 94015. Thank You!

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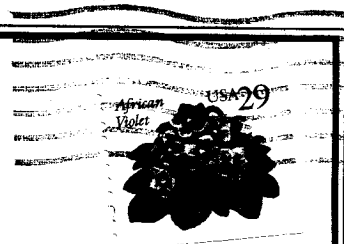
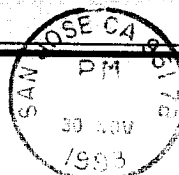
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