

BAAAC PAGE

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

STAS VENGLEVSKI & MIKE ALONGI IN CONCERT

by Robert K. Berta



It has been 5 years since we first heard Stas at BAAC. As a new immigrant to the United States his previous solo performance consisted of a very technical focused program with mostly classic and Russian folk music selections. Five solid years of the "American Experience" has really helped to broaden Stas musically and this resulted in a much more sophisticated, mature performance. This time both Mike & Stas showed their versatility in a wide variety of wonderful music. While doing so they also showcased both of their formidable composing and arranging skills.

It is interesting that unlike most other countries, Russian music does not break into the folk vs. jazz vs. modern music vs. classic music camps. Instead all types of music honor the other and recognize that all types of music can exist and learn/advance together. As a result music in Russia—especially accordion music—has arguably reached a higher level of achievement and sophistication than other countries. A previous BAAC Concert

Artist and Stas' teacher, Frederick Lips, has written a brilliant book on the *Artistry of the Bayan* which discusses this in more detail. I consider the new English translation of Lips' book to be the best expenditure of \$25 any accordionist can make (*it's available through Deffner publications*). I was pleased to see that this happy coexistence of all music was very obvious in the wonderful compositions that Stas and Mike performed. From a lovely composition in French musette style *Lets Play Together*, to the *Midnight Waltz*, to a really neat suite of musical "images" called *Carnival of Animals* we were constantly reminded of the traditions of Russian accordionists. I was particularly impressed with the neat images that the duet concocted in our minds in the *Carnival of Animals*. Whether the flighty birds, the ponderous elephant or the cheetah chasing the rabbit—the attributes of the accordion were used to creative effect and in a very masterful display of technical virtuosity. While we have seen many various "tricks" like endless variations of bellows

"Mike & Stas use the bellows like a painter uses his brush to create beautiful powerful images."

shake, tremolo, strumming of the bellows or thumping on the bellows as a drum, the selection entitled *Cock Fight* was the first time I have seen two handed bass technique: both of Stas' hands performed on the free bass at the same time.

Stas then performed a solo of his latest composition, *Adagio*—what a moving piece. In the hands of a master like Stas the bellows is no longer a air pump, but a living constantly evolving emotional extension of his being that probes the very soul of the music. The bellows is the most important part of an accordion in my view; it allows the accordion to have a life of its own—one moment with deep powerful breaths, then with measured precise light sighs that seem almost like they were trying to caress the seeds from a dandelion flower. True masters of the instrument like Mike & Stas use the bellows like a painter uses his brush to create beautiful powerful images.

Stas continued with a medley on 10 favorite melodies many of which are well known to any musician, but with delightful new arrangements that

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made these well worn tunes as fresh as a summer breeze. He finished up with another piece in French musette style.

After a well deserved break at intermission, Mike returned for solo performances of a couple of jazz classics, *On the Sunny Side of the Street* and *Volare* which were especially appreciated by the Jazz aficionados in the audience. Mike has a very involving musical sense and the dynamics he achieves are always seamlessly appropriate for the music and never overstated.

After Mike's solos Stas rejoined him for an *Italian Mazurka* that set everyone's toes tapping. This was followed with another lovely series: a French musette, a dramatic *Ecstasy Tango*, a moving *Autumn Salute* and finally an emotional

tribute to a recently deceased friend [1999] and major talent in the Chicago area, Lindy Kao.

It is very obvious that Stas is maturing into a fantastic world class musician. And Mike is a perfect counterpoint for him. It seems that they are locked in a perfect symbiotic relationship with performances that are just perfectly matched—each adding just the right amount of juxtaposition to enhance the overall performance. It seems that the duets of Mike and Stas are just about as perfect a combination as one could wish. Hopefully we won't have to wait another five years for a return performance!

CONDOLENCES TO KRIS NELSON & FAMILY

The President and Board of BAAC would like to belatedly call the attention of all our members to the sad passing last month of the father of Kris Nelson. We all know Kris as one of our hardest working members who has never hesitated to help, volunteer and do his absolute best to make our club better. All the while he's done so much for us, he's simultaneously and unselfishly been the President of the *Accordion Club of the Redwoods* as well as the Editor of its excellent newsletter *Reedwooder*. Our hearts go out to Kris and his family and we hope and pray for some comfort in their loss and for the peace and serenity of the soul of their dearly departed loved one.

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TEACH SPEAK

Teach Speak is a column open to our teachers & others who would like to share tips and advice with our readers. We're especially grateful that Mike has been such a generous contributor over the past several issues.

Don't Be A Drag

by Mike Zampiceni

Is your playing a drag? Your playing could be a drag if you're holding down your basses longer than they should be held. This is known as the dragging bass syndrome. Some folks even lengthen their chord buttons so that both the bass and chords are draggy. Generally, though, the usual transgression is to hold down bass buttons too long.

Generally, basses should be played crisply. Think of them as too hot to touch, and their articulation should be just about right. If you have a bass line with all quarter notes, are both the basses and chords being held down for the same duration? They should be. Otherwise, your playing may be a drag for all those who listen to you.



ART VAN DAMME ANNOUNCES

A new compilation CD that combines two albums (24 selections) of top standards from Accordion Ala Mode & A Perfect Match, the latter with Johnny Smith on guitar. It's available from Dotart Music, PO Box 966, Roseville, CA 95678 for \$19.95 Post Paid.

WHO WAS FIRST?

[Editor's note: This article was written by an unknown writer and published in Accordion News in August 1935. We found it on the excellent website Accordions Worldwide (www.accordions.com) and have reprinted it here. We thought it would be of interest to our readers given its historical value and all the connections it has with San Francisco, the Piatanese family and the recent unveiling at BAAC of Pietro Deiro's later instrument (1917)— an accordion which was beautifully and lovingly restored by our living treasure Vince Cirelli prior to sending it to Italy for exhibition.]

Who was first? Pietro Deiro and Guido Deiro: both were pioneers of the piano accordion in America and both are in disagreement as to their early playing dates and places.

Guido insists he was the first one to introduce the piano accordion to the stage, at The American Theatre in San Francisco, in 1910. Pietro asserts that he first played the piano accordion in 1907, at the Washington Square Theatre in San Francisco and that his was the first instrument with a piano keyboard constructed in America and presented to the American public.

Guido and Pietro each have a great following in the accordion world and their conflicting claims have divided accordionists into two controversial camps. They both offer proof substantiating their respective statements and *Accordion News* earnestly opens its columns to all those who may have enlightening data to add so that accordion history can be documented. Guido has not made a direct statement to *Accordion News* and this magazine and its readers cannot form an opinion until all facts are verified.

The well-reputed Santo Santucci, of Lyon & Healy, Inc., Chicago, says:

"Being one of the first accordion players ever to bring this instrument on the stage in the United States and abroad and having irrefutable proofs of what I write below, I feel it is my duty as an honest man, to correct a statement made by a speaker at the convention of the National Association of Music Merchants, held at the Steven's Hotel in Chicago. The speaker is unknown to me, but it is evident that he is new in the accordion field and certainly misinformed.

The statement I wish to correct was to the effect that Pietro Deiro was the first player to introduce the piano accordion on the stage. This is not true, as all those who are aware of the true facts know.

Guido Deiro, the elder of the Deiros, was the first to introduce the piano accordion on the stage. The year was 1910 and the place the American Theatre in San Francisco, California. Guido Deiro was billed as "The Premier Piano Accordionist" in recognition of this primacy. Guido Deiro was also the first to make Victor Records. If I remember rightly, this honor was also wrongly credited to Pietro Deiro by the unknown speaker.

I believe it is only fair to give credit where it belongs and I trust the honest policy of Accordion News to give publicity to this

letter. Pietro Deiro and Guido Deiro are friends of mine, and it is for this reason that I feel compelled to write these lines. The truth will never hurt anybody."

(Ed. Note: The speaker referred to is assumed to be George M. Bundy, President of Accordiana, Inc. and Secretary of Excelsior Accordion Mfg. Company, who introduced Pietro Deiro at the first of the two concerts given at the Steven's Hotel in Chicago during the recent [1935] Music Trades Convention.)

Undoubtedly Santo Santucci represents the opinion of many hundreds of accordionists in Chicago and other cities of the Western states and *Accordion News* is pleased to give space to the views of those who apparently represent the views of a great accordionist nucleus and most probably those of Guido Deiro himself.

Accordion News' Chicago correspondent, Andy Rizzo, talented and active young accordionist and accredited teacher, takes up the story at this point and reports:

"Cheered by the accordionists of Chicago, after a stay of over a month in our City, Guido Deiro left for the West and North West on July 26th, accompanied by the best wishes of all his old and new friends.

As the readers of this magazine know, Guido Deiro came to Chicago to sign a contract with the Italo-American Accordion Mfg. Co., by whom he was granted all the states of the Pacific Coast and British Columbia in Canada as his exclusive territory for the sale of Italo-American instruments. As a demonstrator of these accordions, Mr Deiro attended the convention of the National Association of Music Merchants in Chicago.

On July 25th on the initiative of the aforementioned company, a banquet was given in honor of Guido Deiro attended by accordionists, manufacturers, dealers in musical instruments, lovers of music and personal friends of the guest of honor.

Guido Deiro needs no introduction to anyone. He, who first introduced the piano accordion on the stage as "a solo" instrument introduced himself at the banquet, giving a sketch of his adventurous life and mentioning the fact that, besides introducing the piano accordion on the stage, he was the first to play this instrument over the radio, in concerts, on records, and on the Vitaphone. This part of his speech was met with approval by Santo Santucci, his old friend, who knows all this to be nothing less than the truth, and who bitterly complained that full recognition is willfully withheld from Mr Deiro in certain quarters.

Guido Deiro is a fine speaker but it must be admitted that he is a better player of the piano accordion. He was applauded in his speech but admired and loved as a great artist for his playing. He played his new 'Guido Deiro Italoitone' which was just out of the factory. Santo Santucci and his son Nick played after Guido Deiro and they had their share of applause, none more sincere than that coming from Mr. Deiro himself who embraced his friend Santucci.

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Who Was First? *continued*

The success of the banquet was assured by the presence of all the leading accordionists of Chicago, including Mario DeBiase and Walter Litus, 'the two inseparables' as they are called around Chicago, your correspondent (Andy Rizzo) and many others. Manufacturers of piano accordions and dealers in musical instruments were present too: Messrs.: Petromilli, Piatenesi and Roscinani of the Italo-American Accordion Co., Messrs. Keenley and Parker of the Lyon & Healy Co., Inc., etc. Mrs. Litus must also be mentioned, being the only lady present and therefore the life of the party."

Guido Deiro's career as an accordionist abounds with facts and activities which have become the substance of great public interest over time. When vaudeville was at its height, Guido Deiro was living with Mae West, the now famous motion picture actress. It has always happened that women have played an important and inspirational part in Guido's artistic life. *Accordion News* would like Miss West to furnish us with any proof she may have to substantiate the controversial claim that Guido Deiro was the first player to introduce the piano accordion on the stage in America.

Through the courtesy of a former Loew's Circuit Manager, who booked Mae West and Guido together at the time they made their famous agreement not to appear without the other, *Accordion News* has two photographs of Mae West dating back to that time, whose value and illustrative importance cannot be over emphasized. The photographs were taken at the Mecca Studios in Indianapolis, approximately twenty years ago [1914-15].

Our informer says Mae West's part of the act was to sing and tell breezy stories and jokes. It will be of interest to *Accordion News* readers to know that Mae West had an accordion which was lent to her by Pietro Deiro and belonged to Mrs. Pietro Deiro. Apparently, Mae West could not play the instrument, so while she simulated playing, Guido Deiro, in the wings, would supply the real music.

At the end of the playing and on acknowledging the applause, Mae would open her accordion and produce a funny, discordant sound while bowing. Later, when her accordion disappeared, Pietro Deiro reclaimed it after finally locating it in a pawnshop by which time Guido may have been discarded by Miss West, too.

Guido and Mae were the pampered stars of the vaudeville stage at the time, and so was Pietro Deiro. Pietro was booked for as much as four hundred dollars a week [big money in those days]. Guido and Mae lived together for a period of about four years—a record for Guido [nearly miraculous for Mae]. Usually they didn't last that long [for either]!

A photograph of Pietro Deiro is claimed to have been taken 27 years ago [1907-08] with the first piano accordion constructed in America by Pascuale Petromilli (known under the trade name of Guerrini) and played by Pietro for the first time in the Washington Square Theatre in San Francisco. Finau Piatenesi made the decorations on the box; Anthony Petromilli, brother of Pascuale Petromilli (recently deceased) made the reeds. Another Piatenesi, presently with the

Colombo Accordion Company of San Francisco, made the keyboard. These gentlemen should remember when they made the accordion as this instrument was not easy to manufacture. It was "completely made over" three times, first having two and three sets of reeds and later with three and four sets, with a switch operated from behind the frame of the treble keyboard. It can be seen in this photo [we don't have it] that the treble keyboard had 42 keys instead of the 41 now in vogue—the extra key consisting of an E on the lower octave. There were only 108 bass buttons.

Pietro Deiro says:

"I am sorry that I have no programs of the premiere of my accordion performance in the Washington Square Theatre in San Francisco, 27 years [1907-08] ago. At that time it was not customary to issue programs for this kind of vaudeville performance. Most assuredly such a program would settle dates, doubts and misinterpretations for good, but we cannot revive the past in order to procure a theatre program as documentary data for the history of the piano accordion. If anyone by any chance has a printed proof of one of my later performances not more than a year later, I'd very much appreciate receiving it.

What I remember very distinctly is that the first night of my accordion playing in San Francisco must have been in the fall. It was raining very heavily, one of those thick autumn rains of the Coast. I played with a guitarist and while we were performing on the stage one of the bass buttons got stuck. I couldn't go on and the guitarist had to continue alone. We also had a singer with us, and I still recollect this detail: Anthony Petromilli was in the audience, realized the predicament I was in and came rushing back stage, screwdriver in hand. While the singer was entertaining the public, Petromilli fixed my bass button. It was then realized that a new accessory was needed to stop the basses from going all the way in, to avoid a repeat of such an embarrassing situation.

My brother Guido was not yet in America. He was still in Italy. I sent him his ticket a year after this performance. My brother could not have played in San Francisco at the time of my first presentation of the piano accordion because I had not yet sent him the money to come. Let it be well understood that what I claim is that the first piano accordion built in America and presented publicly to the American people was made for and played by me.

Before the piano accordion was introduced to America, Italy had it. I also remember very clearly that I introduced my brother Guido on the American stage and that once I paid four dollars for a second-hand full dress suit for Guido (in Seattle) who was scheduled to appear with me in San Francisco.

We played together and we both shared great successes, Guido becoming rapidly very popular, especially among restaurant waiters for his large and ostentatious tips. A few years later in New York, Mae West, Guido and I went for supper to the old Gillette's restaurant. The meal finished, my brother left a two-dollar tip on the table. As he rose to leave, I picked up one of the dollars and later went fifty-fifty with Mae West. This got to be a habit with us.

I owe it to the public and to my respect for truthfulness, to tell those circumstantial facts which prove convincingly that the narrator has lived through the great events surrounding the point of discussion."



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Another outstanding show by two great visiting guests, Mike Alongi and Stas Vengleski. These wonderful musicians should be a part of every member's musical history. I can recall in the 1940's seeing and hearing Gallirini and Oakley Yale from the Buffalo symphony perform & what a great impact they made in my musical career. When BAAC brings musicians of this caliber, you should do your very best to attend. It will do wonders for you. I have been far too remiss in recognizing all the wonderful volunteers who make this club successful. We could not operate without these unsung heroes who make the meetings run, do the correspondence and all the necessary functions. We have had many different members for the past 10 years who have spent so much time and effort to benefit all of us. Unfortunately, these days the volunteer list is far too short for what is needed to make each task easier.

Here is a list of our present volunteers who get too little recognition. Secretary-Treasurer Val Kieser spends hours every week with membership lists, mailing labels, postage, correspondence and now financial reports. Isn't there somebody in this large club who could help? John Seckman spends 10 hours a month with no pay doing the BAAC PAGE layout despite the fact he has a full time job with over 100 students. We have now hired one of his students to help since nobody volunteered to assist. As BAAC PAGE Editor, Paul Magistretti spends endless hours writing, proofing, collecting material and soliciting articles for no pay and he has a full time job. Rusty Bartoli gets the labels and postage to mail you your copy of BAAC PAGE.

Jim Holliday meets you at the door and makes out your name tag, Lou Casalnuova collects your door fee plus getting the mail from our PO box, Frank Schlotter makes your membership card, plus he is now Club Historian. Jim Firpo spent hours at the door as well as bringing our snacks and hauling the T-shirts and buttons and tapes and CD's until a recent stroke slowed him down. Yet, he came back to greet you at the door and check your membership card. What a wonderful guy! Evelyn Baulch sees to selling our raffle tickets so one of you can win some money and we can help our scholarship fund. Domenic & Frances Benedetto are now bringing the

after-meeting food to our gatherings and that chore takes no little time and effort. Jim Holliday always gets to the meetings early and arranges the chairs in the Patio Espanol—they don't arrange themselves—and I think a few volunteers help. Now Tom Orzechowski has agreed to store all our equipment and we are going to pay him \$20 a month for this service. He will bring to each meeting the PA set plus T-shirts, CD's and all the small things we sell. We could use some help at the tables selling these items, if you'll pitch in.

Whenever I need anything done, I turn to Kris Nelson and he is mister everything. What a great help he has been to me in so many ways, whether writing our awards or helping set up, mind and break down our booth at Cotati.

Our entertainment is now being handled by Bob Berta, who has done a thousand things for this club in the past and still does, pitching in to help Val Kieser, myself and any Board Member however he can. He's been a heart and soul member all along.

And every program is videotaped by our reliable videographer, Ed Zaro—talk about dedication.

I want to add here a special thanks to Don Nurisso and Marian Kelly for hosting our recent concert guests for 4 days—service above and beyond, truly.

My God, every month, Joe Smiell writes all the arrangements for the two bands he conducts. Can you imagine how much time that takes? He performs what is strictly a labor of love for the accordion and all the participants and the club as a whole that is without equal.

If I forgot to mention anyone and what you do and have done for our club, forgive me—I know this present list is far from inclusive and I left out our past heroes on a previous occasion. Please feel free to speak up and write and remind all of us and we will try to give honor where honor is due for BAAC has had many wonderful people help us.

As you can tell by this message, we need volunteer help. Won't you take a moment and ask yourself, "Is there something I could do that would help?" We have a good club and a worthy cause, please think of what you might do.

Kris Nelson wrote in the REEDWOODER that when you thank a club's President you are really thanking all the volunteers who make the meetings successful. I (very humbly) couldn't agree more!

Ho Ho Ho and a jolly Christmas to all of you.

— Lou Soper

DO DUES, THEY'RE DUE

It's time to pay your dues. Memberships will be checked at the door and if you've not renewed by (or at) the December gathering we will have to charge you the non-member fee, as well as delete you from further mailings of the newsletter. We don't want to! Please! So, Dear Member, if you've disremembered, overlooked or mind-slipped, please rejoin us. Give us

another chance. We want you, we need you, we have to have you! Where else can you get such unabashed desire and passion these days for \$25? Send DUES to: BAAC, PO Box 318175, San Francisco, CA 94131-8175, or pay at the door in December (for sure) & get a hug.

THE WAYS OF STEALING *(and being better for it)*

By Paul A. Magistretti

I'd never recommend illegal or immoral behavior, least of all to accordion players. Of course, I don't want to preclude accordionists from seeking corporate fortunes or high office if wickedness is their talent. On a certain level there is a connection between playing music well and—there's no other word for it, stealing. Robber Baron might be a title for the greatest musicians who've ever lived, though most died in relative or absolute poverty. Great musicians have stolen and stolen and stolen only to die with nothing to show for it. How can that be? Well, it be—because they stole benignly, lovingly, generously & for art. The larceny of musicians can be summed up by the word *rubato*. In Italian *rubato* is the past participle of *rubare* (to steal) and means, *robbed*.

Some background on rubato:

"It is a momentary disregard for strict tempo, during which the performer varies the length of a note (or notes) in such a manner as to clarify or enhance the phrase. The resumption of the tempo necessitates the shortening of other notes, either before or after the prolonged one. Although it is not imperative that the tempo be resumed within the measure, this is usually done; if the resumption is withheld for too long a period, the performance of the rubato is lost.

The rubato first became prevalent in the solo singing that arose in the late Sixteenth Century, when it was used to clarify, rather than to heighten, the meaning of the text. By the Eighteenth Century it was a much-abused device, and many singers took advantage of it to indulge in capricious display. It was most often employed at the cadences. Performers also frequently modified the accompaniment to suit the rubato, thus destroying the essential element of syncopation. Pietro Francesco Tosi (1647-1727), in his book *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, spoke of the Òriginous precept concerning time, Ò and urged that the accompaniment follow its strict course. Of the same opinion was Mozart who, at 21, astonished his audiences by keeping strict time with his left hand during the performance of a rubato in the right.

Much ink has been spilled over the Chopin rubato. Chopin himself always kept the accompaniment in strict tempo; he is quoted by one of his pupils as having said, "let your left hand be your conductor and always keep time." Although there are only a few appearances of the written direction "rubato," Chopin employed it extensively in playing his own compositions. Finally, however, the question of the rubato remains one of individual taste." (*The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians, Ninth Edition*).

A more succinct definition of rubato is, it's "robbed or stolen time: irregular time; meaning a slight deviation to give more expression by retarding one note and quickening another, but so that the time of each measure is not altered as a whole." (*Elson's Music Dictionary*).

Anyway, the nature of the stealing under consideration is clear now. It's a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul (musically). It's absolutely basic for expressiveness in music. No matter how careful, thorough and detailed notation is it can never really fully reveal exactly how a musical phrase should be played. Every musical phrase has an arc and shape (as was discussed in *Of Lungs & Machines*)—okay, there's an arc, an audible rainbow, but what happens *within the arc*? Well, the notation is supposed to reveal the relative method of playing the notes. However, notation can't tell the whole story—for within every notated rainbow there is an uncharted realm full of potential for tiny, almost imperceptible thefts of time. The results are usually obvious (even if we don't know what's going on) whenever we hear a great player—we instantly know something is happening which makes the playing deep and expressive. We say that he or she really *feels* the music and is able to make us *feel* it, bringing the notes to life in ways we never thought possible. To further emphasize the point: if, for example, we heard ten players play the same piece we would probably notice that each one played it ever so slightly (or greatly) differently. We've heard the same tunes played by hundreds if not thousands of people and they all sounded different. Yet, the music existed on the page in exactly the same

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THE SCRAPBOOK OF VAL AND JOHN

By Valerie Kieser

John and I had lunch plus a long visit with Al Monti, Pres. of the Arizona Accordion Club, and Carlo Iorio, also of that club. We had a great jam session and a wonderful visit.

Al's house looks like an accordion museum. I've never seen so many accordions in one place outside of Petosa's! Some are for sale, some are on consignment, some are museum pieces (old), and some are the ones Al uses. His favorites that he plays are his Petosa Millenium Reedless and, for pure reeds, a really nice, lightweight Imperial that I tried. It was very responsive and had a wonderful sound. During our visit in the Phoenix area, we also had dinner with Charlotte and Bruce Mehlhop, who are button-boxers that I met about five years ago through Joe Smiell. Again, we had a wonderful visit.

STEALING *continued*

form. The players read the same notes on the page, started from the same score, but their expression was different. How? Why? Was it touch? Dynamics? The mystique of talent? Yes and no.

I remember listening to a CD of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto #1 with a friend who was following the performance with the written score. My pal, a pianist, was constantly leaping to his feet and wondering where certain notes were—for they were absolutely not written down. He said there were blatant changes in the values of notes, too. He wondered, why the idiotic soloist couldn't follow the text. When he'd vented his wrath for the tenth time, I told him the pianist was Rachmaninoff and that he must know how the music was supposed to be played better than the printed page. I thought it would prove a point I had tried to make many times with my pal (who couldn't understand Jazz by the way) that you can't really indicate how a phrase should ultimately and/or exclusively be played from a printed score—you start, but not end with the page, for a score is often a shadowy blueprint. I tried to explain that the limitation of musical notation was why great interpreters were needed to make music come alive; why the greatest jazz couldn't be written: that the expressive range of great music in performance always exceeded the capacities of notation and that only pedantic scholars and unimaginative interpreters insisted otherwise. Classical (& all) music only lives when performers of genius fill its dimensions with insight and inspiration that can't be annotated. Interpretive freedom was fully understood and even required well into the Nineteenth Century—for example, cadenzas were never written but were left for any performer worthy of being called an artist to improvise. Bach's genius as an improviser was said to be far greater than his genius as expressed in his written works—a thought which makes every music lover wish recording devices were available three hundred years ago. The tragedy of classical music in the 20th Century is that (with the exception of certain geniuses), it was separated from its source—for it springs from the same expressive life force as jazz. Many scholars failed to appreciate that Chopin only wrote *rubato* in a few places because *rubato* was the norm and not the exception.

My score-sniffing friend still held to a concept of literalism. No amount of proof that notation is infinitely less expressive than a dynamic performance convinced him. He couldn't understand that the life of music lay in small and at times imperceptible shifts, hesitations, rushes, pauses, accelerations and decelerations that steal (from the heart) the time needed to make a line of music come to life and sing. He didn't seem to realize that the end result of performing music must be to make it *live within a phrase from note to note*—not to reproduce what was written. I told my friend that reproducing what was on a page has been done by machines, but machines have never matched Casals, Segovia, Glenn Gould, Art Tatum or Zoot Sims, etc. Well, if Rachmaninoff didn't convince him, how could I?

The effect of *rubato* is most obvious with singers. Like him or not, Sinatra was a Mafioso of time. His stealing technique in later years became something of a parody, but his fabled

phrasing was originally built on superb stealing. When he was young and vocally endowed he stole with subtlety and finesse like a fine sleight of hand magician—later, his act became as blatant as sawing a vocal chord in half and so filled with *caesuras* (interpretive breaks) that he had time to drink a Jack Daniels and take a puff or two between “I've got you” and “under my skin.”

When I was a kid taking accordion lessons I never heard of *rubato*. I knew that sometimes I felt the music and played more expressively than other times, but I never knew why. Well, I knew that when somebody gave me money my expressiveness shot way up. In fact, one time my parents threw a big New Years party when I was eleven and when everyone got drunk they enjoyed my playing enough to start a “kitty.” I never played better. My adrenalin got pumping so hard that I achieved at a new state of consciousness. There were moments when I understood Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* as it applied to *Quando Ero Piccolino* and *Stumbling*. Vast expanses of time and space opened and I could wander around in tunes adding nuances, touches and tweaks of expressiveness like Holy Water. I had powers of finesse I never knew I possessed all the while pumping out a nice 4/4 bass. It was as if the two hemispheres of my brain were plugged into each hand separately and I was seated between them deigning to add a dash of pathos here and a smidgen of joy there. I could hold onto or shorten notes wherever I wanted and come out right on time. Afterwards, I was never able to figure out why I was better that night. I only knew that somehow my consciousness was so elevated that I entered into an altered state of *rubato* fever. The sheer force of greed tripped me out better than LSD and I was never tempted by drugs.

My ignorance of *rubato* was understandable. I had only heard the word once during all my accordion lessons. In contrast, I was drilled by my teachers about keeping strict time with both hands. The occasion when I heard *rubato* (without understanding it) was when my Uncle Louie sat in on one of my lessons. At that time I had a teacher who came to the house and Luigi happened to be visiting. Anyway, Mio Zio listened along with the teacher as I ground out *Under The Double Eagle* a bit more expressively than usual. Maybe I was better because Louie was there (he was actually my great uncle) and he was a real *paisan* who spoke the dialect (my grandfather had died long before I was born), so he gave me a generational lift. At the end of the piece, Luigi looked at my teacher, nodded and said, “*Rubato*.” I didn't know what he meant. I think my teacher thought my uncle accused him of stealing money from my parents by teaching me. Anyway, my teacher got a little red in the face, but because he was a *paisan* and my Uncle Louie's *Ticinese* accent threw him and Uncle Louie was a dapper guy, slim, well dressed and looked a little like Lucky Luciano, nothing was said and *rubato* was never mentioned again in polite company or during lessons—unfortunately.

Rubato is the way a performer shapes, molds and aligns a musical phrase internally—polishes it to its absolute finest

continued on next page

STEALING *continued*

expression through tiny adjustments in the values of notes to make the phrase hold together, arc and sing as never before. Non-accordionists have an easier job stealing, because they're not Siamese-twinning to a left hand that's determined to pound out strict, unvarying beats. Teachers impress upon us rigid bass patterns—which is all to the good. But then, the machine-like nature of the bass gets into our consciousness, so that stealing becomes as unthinkable and rare as when Mozart first did it. Jazz accordionists escape the whole problem by having a rhythm section take over permitting their left hands to leave their right hands alone to accomplish the Zen-like sound of one hand playing. Of course, our best players swing with both hands. I remember an after hours jam at Cotati ten years ago when Ken Ohlendorf, Peter Soave and Frank Marocco played together. Ken and Peter let Frank handle the bass and I've rarely heard a better swinging, driving bass combined with a free-swinging right hand.

On the dark side, there is a particular way that accordionists steal time. It's a dire theft of one dimension; they take away time and never give it back. The majority of accordionists usually perform a single kind of rubato—a hot-fingered, sketchy dancing over the notes that always ends up cutting time. If the accordion were a string instrument, it'd be analogous to when violinists play *pizzicato*; you know, pluck. When accordionists steal the time by lightly dancing over the keys it's a kind of *mandolino* approach (sometimes they even fill in by rapidly repeating notes in imitation of a mandolin). The only problem is that a mandolin's strings continue to vibrate after the plucker has moved on and we get a nice wake of buzzing overtones and resonance, which has a certain aesthetic effect. But accordions don't buzz after the player dances over the keys. Accordion keys are on/off in a second with no resonance afterwards. The effect can be stunning for a while, a kind of breathless, rapid-fire display, but two things happen. First, because we're placed within a performer's relative world of playing, we may not notice that overall expression is limited; we just accept the breathless display. Sometimes the display is all the audience expects from an accordion—which is unfortunate for it ignores the instrument's wonderful, expressive dimensions. Alas, when a great many people, even so-called accordion lovers, believe that all there is to the instrument is speed burning and quick-quick-quicker tunes played faster than a speeding bullet—then we lose the accordion's true identity and potential.

In fact, there are many (maybe too many) dedicated accordion listeners who are content to settle for a limited use of the instrument. Worse, there's also a general public that finds sketchy *rubato breve* repeated endlessly tiresome and annoying: first, on a subliminal level, then consciously and finally they throw open the doors of their perception and heap denigration and ridicule on what is only one-tenth of one percent of what an accordion is. The accordion's falsely perceived lack of expressiveness (i.e., that it doesn't possess emotional depth) is what leads too many people to discount it as being musically shallow: a ridiculous notion. On the other hand, too few people have had the privilege of hearing deep, moving performances

on an accordion; they only know it as a mechanical, perky thing that gets played fast. Many accordion lovers see it that way, too. Have Peter Soave play a heart-rending *Cavatina* (from *The Deer Hunter*) and they're bored. During the twelve years I played, I never had anyone ask me to play something deep and moving. All they wanted were fast pop tunes, polkas, marches and waltzes—lots of peppy stuff.

Consider, stealing time away from all the notes in order to whisk over a tune (as most accordionists do) can seem like speed reading out loud—something like the previews of coming attractions, “previously on ER you saw”; it plays to listeners like clips or montages—which are never emotionally involving. If you say *Moby Dick* is about a big whale, you're not delivering much of an emotional impact. Sketchy accordion music survived in the past because people were dancing and essentially not listening; all that was needed was a cheerful filler for the rhythm section and not much else. But when people raised their expectations and listened, then light-fingered dances tended to reveal a lack of any deeper emotional appeal—and given the potential of music, the considerable talent of our players and the instrument itself, a curse was set upon us. We live in the backlash—*listeners* want to be moved and erroneously don't believe they *can be* by accordions. The accordion ends up getting ghettoized into a narrow niche as a jolly, shallow filler (which ironically contents many of our so-called fans) and the general public remains ignorant of its emotional power.

Another one-way rubato legacy sabotages us when accordionists steal time not just as a stylistic ploy, but as a way to reach the next note—a mechanical need—setting up an uncontrollable momentum. I've heard thousands of accordionists start out stealing time and end up playing faster and faster and faster, as if stealing on the short created a domino effect leaving them farther and farther behind and hopelessly trying to catch up. I don't think I've heard any other group of musicians play piece after piece while succumbing to involuntary increases in tempi in the middle of selections until they self-destruct. It's as if once they start short-stealing they have to do it more and more until they're on their way down a slippery slope.

The hot-fingers syndrome stifles expressiveness and the natural breath of music. The syndrome exaggerates the instrument's mechanical nature. The fact that accordions quickly turn notes on and off without any residual hum or echo is something to overcome not emphasize. The resultant silence after each note is what drives players to hit another note right away—and since he/she is short timing notes anyway, they need another and another, faster and faster. I think accordionists want to record with reverb because it seems like a way of sustaining notes—a mistaken notion, as I've said elsewhere. Hands down, an accordion plays faster than any other instrument, but lacking a sustain pedal or vibrations after the fact—it needs performance adjustment. Accordionists rarely seem to consider controlled legato the way organists do to master their instrument's on/off nature (and an organ has resonant vibrations in the pipes, as well as natural reverb and mechanical

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THE WAYS OF STEALING (and being better for it) *continued*

vibrato). But while an accordion lacks certain lingering properties it's possible to balance the instrument through opposing its mechanical nature and avoiding one-way rubato.

When an accordionist creates a breathy, sketchy, outline effect that turns music into a form of code—the instrument gets blamed. It doesn't matter what kind of music is played. I've found hot-fingered, *prestomania* as prevalent in classical music as pop. One-way rubato is particularly strong among Russian players who have been influenced by folk music and the Russian quick-quick-quicker concept of tempo—thrilling in its proper context—but usually the province of other instruments. For example, Russian folk music is usually led by domras and balalaikas, stringed instruments that vibrate after a note is plucked, so that as the string player rushes on and on there is a continuum, a mixing of vibrations across bars and measures that has its own aesthetic charm. For example, Gnesin Institute, where Lips teaches, is dedicated to folk music and the domra (a small stringed instrument) is the star vehicle. Bayanists are essentially accompanists. Now, in such a folkish musical culture it's natural for bayan players to become captivated by the crisp, rapid, staccato playing of the domra. Certainly a bayan can more than match the speed of any plucked instrument and if kept in the background then a kind of *rubato troppo breve* effect isn't bad in creating a sketchy obbligato, especially with the strings vibrating across bars and measures as well as supplying the lead voice. But when bayanists turn soloists, then I fear *rubato troppo breve* becomes an unfortunate habit.

Accordionists have to be careful of staccato/pizzicato playing—they have to hold notes and play the short, the long and the in-between of rubato in the right places making use of caesuras (breaks) and fulfilling musical phrasing in every way possible to avoid the shorthand, breathiness that comes so easily to the fingers, but not to the

human heart. In terms of superb rubato playing I thought Christine Rossi on her CD *Accordeon de Concert* was almost without equal. She held onto notes and created expressive lines like no one else. Unfortunately, she hasn't made a solo CD in nine years and her marriage to the Russian composer/bayanist Alexandre Chmyrkov combined with their duo concerts has seemingly influenced her towards the Russian style and *rubato troppo breve*—although the evidence is too slight at this point to determine if her great gift has been diminished.

Accordion artists have to offset their instrument's mechanical propensity; that's one challenge. Astor Piazzolla's aesthetic supplied a good example of a solution. Piazzolla would hang onto notes for dear life utilizing passionate full-noted, *rubato lungo* and creating emotional, expressive phrasing that became the powerful hallmark of his artistry and propelled him onto the world's stage as a performer who without question is history's most widely known, successful and influential free-reed performer/composer. Astor held onto notes as well as fired off machinegun riffs of astonishing speed—he stole every mini-second of time every which way he could to wrest the greatest expressive impact possible from a phrase. His sense of rubato was fully developed and that's what accordionists need. In the process he defined himself and his instrument to the world's consciousness as a serious, emotion-altering performer, existing above all preconceptions and stereotypes. Certainly, we have equally great artists who display that selfsame kind of well-rounded expressiveness of which rubato is a major tool, but few audiences have heard them and there still exists too many accordion players who fail to understand rubato's role in expressive playing—as well as too many fans who want to keep it that way—and a public perception that has been wrongly conditioned to think that accordion playing lacks reflection and depth.

WE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE

As the year draws to a close and the Holiday Season is upon us, we would like to acknowledge the following generous BAAC Patrons who have financially supported our club during the last year and a half: Patrons of the General Fund: Victoria Wendling, Al Monti (of The Arizona Accordion Club) and Mr. Myron Floren. Scholarship Patrons: Ernest Lantz, Ron Harris, David and Betty Pollack, Michael Marotta Sr., Valarie Morris, Val Kieser, Dominic Palmisano, Ed Zaro and Nora and Tony Mazzara. Sound System Patrons: Dennis Stoscher, Robert Pisani, Joe Smiell, John & Sheila Gullmes, Lee Woodall, John Puppo, Frank Montoro and Jim Holliday. Accordion Donor: Bob Milbourn. Holiday Party Co-sponsor, Kimric Smythe. Day of the Accordion Sponsors: Amil and Pat Samayoa. Video Camera Donor: C. M. Raja. Thank you one and all. May you have a Joyous Holiday and a wonderful New Year and we hope we can count on the support of wonderful and generous people like you in the years to come.

ACCORDIONS AL DENTE

by Tom Torriglia

Looking for a great stocking stuffer? I received a copy of Sagebrush Swing's latest CD, *Western at Heart*, featuring Barbara Ann Barnett on accordion. It totally swings! It's a tribute album to the music of Bob Wills.

It's a lot of fun and you get to hear the accordion showcased in yet another musical genre; country-swing. My favorite song on the CD is Roly Poly. To get your copy, go to www.sagebrush-swing.com or call (650) 854-5869. Oh, and great vocal stylings between Barbara and Sagebrush guitarist, Audrey McLaughlin.

On the cover of *Western at Heart* is Barbara and Audrey wearing cowboy hats. This is a dead giveaway that this CD is not full of reggae-rap music. For any accordionist who plays out regularly at corporate events, company parties, themed events, festivals, etc, he or she is expected to dress the part. You could be the best darn accordionist in the world, but if you don't have the right outfit, you'll never get hired to play a themed event—ever. Conversely, if you're a competent accordionist and know the songs that you know people will want to hear and you have great themed outfits, you'll get booked all the time. I called someone about a gig last week and said that he had to wear a tux. He said he didn't have one. I told him he couldn't do the gig. It wouldn't have mattered if he were last year's Coupe Mondiale winner. I had a gig today at a company luncheon. The theme was Italian. The client called me twice to discuss what I was going to wear. When I got there, the client said I looked great. When I left, he said my outfit really fit the part. He was very, very pleased. Not once did he mention how well I played. And, boy, did I play well.

Last month, I practically lived in lederhosen going from one Oktoberfest gig to another. Not once did anyone come up and say how well I played. Everyone came up and commented on my outfit (& great-looking legs). It used to be that accordionists always wore white and black regardless of the event. It would be like, "Hey Bob, we have a gig next week. Be sure to wear black pants and a white shirt." It was difficult to differentiate between the waiters and the musicians. But, today it's all about authenticity and colors. For my Italian outfits I have bright red pants, blue-striped shirts, tricolore caps, gondoliere hats, neckerchiefs, etc; a French outfit (with different colored berets), Oktoberfest outfit, full Santa outfit, a couple of tuxedos and an assortment of brightly colored shirts and pants. I am always looking for stage wear. I have to. As I said, if you want to play the gig, you play the part. Once, Ron Borelli and I did a gig where the client had us wear striped prison outfits with a plastic ball and chain attached to our ankles. The event was Alcatraz themed. It was very cool. There's actually a picture on my home page (ladyofspain.com).

So, where can the burgeoning accordionist get this stuff? Well, lots of places. For tuxedo wear, I recommend—I know you're going to be surprised—Burlington Coat Factory! I kid you not. They have black satin, pre-tied ties for 99¢. They have incredible prices on 100% wool tuxes and shirts. They

have tie and cummerbund sets. You can get studs and cuff-link sets for like \$8.00. It's nuts. Go there. They are on Howard St. and also out at Westlake Shopping Center. I bought my patent leather shoes (to go with my tux) at Shoe Pavilion for \$29.95. I checked out the shoes at Selix and they blew big time—kinda one size fits all.

So, what about Lederhosen? Well, you can shop at the German store out on Church and 24th and pay hundreds or you can check out La Rosa or Held Over on Haight street for some used hosen. I went to Held Over today and they had about 20 pair priced at \$75.00 each. (The same guy owns both stores and he goes to Germany each year to buy up a bunch of German outfits to bring back) My drummer, Amy, snagged a pair at Schauptplatz on Valencia for \$45.00. And then, there's always the internet.

One day, Ron Borelli and I decided it was time to spruce up our Italian outfits. That could only mean one thing; no, not North Beach. It meant the pimp store! That's right. Actually, it's called Jeffrey's at 1045 Market St. You want bright red or green pants? You want them tailored while you wait? You want bright anything? You want Jeffrey's.

Uh oh, Bastille Day coming up? Need a beret? Try the Army/Navy surplus store on Haight street, near Held Over. I was in there yesterday and they have red, green, blue, black and maybe even orange. They also have a great assortment of other types of hats. Army/Navy surplus stores are great for finding odd-ball stuff like those red kerchiefs that gondoliers (like me) and cowboys wear.

I always check the next-to-new shops for stuff. That's where I purchased my gold dinner jacket. It kills. Everybody loves that jacket. You'll never know what you'll find. For new costumy clothes, survey says: Ross!

Yes! I love Ross. They have a great assortment of stuff at dirt-cheap prices. Need a new pair of white cotton pants for those summer gigs? Ross for \$12.95. A bright red two-piece suit for \$59.00? Ross rocks! I purchased a new shirt for my German outfit the other week at Ross for like \$10.00. It's perfect. So what if it's a large woman's blouse, it still works perfectly.

Let me know you're favorite shopping spot: tom@ladyofspain.com.

Squeezin's greetings to all.

DOMENIC SASO WROTE

Hi! The BAAC Website is nice. I would like to tell you [John & Paul] & everyone, that I am in a movie that's now playing. It's called *Playing Mona Lisa*. In it are Elliott Gould, Marlo Thomas, Ellisa Witt and a very fine cast, including me! I play the accordion in about two and a half scenes & I even have a credit at the end: Domenic Saso (Accordionist). Try to see it and keep up the good work.

Calendar of Events

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM YOUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

December

- 6 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7 pm**
Patio Espanol, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco
Info: 510.792.8765
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>
- 12 **Golden State Accordion Club Holiday Party, 6:00pm**
Veteran's Memorial Building
549 Merchant St. Vacaville
Info: (707) 864-2359
- 15 **ACR Christmas Dinner Dance. 6:00pm**
Herman Sons Hall. 860 Western. Petaluma
Call John Pordon for info: (707) 935-7334
- 17 **Northwest Accordion Festival. 11am-4pm.**
(Formerly known as the Day of the Accordion)
Seattle Center House, Seattle, WA
Admission: Free. Info: 206.622.4786

January

- 2 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7 pm**
Patio Espanol, 2850 Alemany Blvd
San Francisco. Info: 510.792.8765
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>
- 14 **Polka Madness w/ Henri Ducharme. 2-5 pm**
Bring your accordion and join the band
Boaz Accordions. Sacramento St. at 67
Berkeley, CA. Info: (510) 845-1429 Fee: \$5.00
- 18 **Strictly Tango w/ Dale Meyer, 7:30 pm**
Boaz Accordions. Sacramento St. at 67
Berkeley, CA. Info: (510) 845-1429 Fee: \$4.00
CDs will be available for sale
- 21 **Intro to Button Accordion, 2-4pm**
Boaz Accordions. Sacramento St. at 67
Berkeley, CA. Info: (510) 845-1429 Fee: \$25.00
Limited to 12 students. Register in advance
- 28 **Intro to Piano Accordion, 2-4pm**
Boaz Accordions. Sacramento St. at 67
Berkeley, CA. Info: (510) 845-1429 Fee: \$35.00
Limited to 14 students. Register in advance

Ongoing

BAAC Ensemble rehearsals are the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month
7:00 pm, Moose Lodge Daly City
Call Frank Montoro (650) 574-4757 to confirm

(BAAC Ensemble should not be confused with ACE ensemble, which is an entirely different group, also affiliated with BAAC)

BAAC "Fun Band" rehearsals are the third Wednesday of the month, 7:00 pm,
Moose Lodge Daly City
Call Val Kieser (510) 531-4836 to confirm.

We have approx. \$7,750 in our bank accounts. The first Membership Workshop for 2001 will be given by Joe Smiell on a Saturday in January, time and date TBA. It will be a very special one and will include all playing levels. Billy Wilson and his Cajun band will play for us. We're aiming for February since all our meetings are booked until then. BAAC is purchasing, at wholesale cost, a number of animated accordion-playing Santas that play "Jingle Bells". These will be for sale at the December meeting at the discounted price of \$40 each (list is \$45). So, we will all have an opportunity to both help the club and add an adorable Holiday decoration to our homes. Submitted by Valerie Kieser, Secretary.

*** December is Xmas Fun, songs & party night.*
ACE & BAAC ensembles play plus the FUN BAND!**

It promises to be a great time & Bob Smith WILL step out with a solo of a rarely heard Irving Berlin song about Santa Claus. Bring your accordion & join in with BAAC members on the 4-Christmas/Holiday songs which will be sent out with the newsletter.

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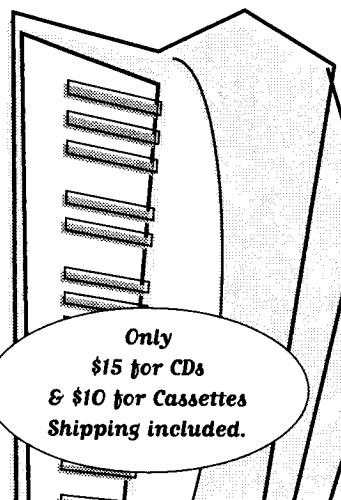
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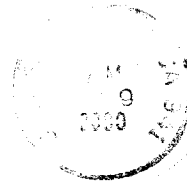
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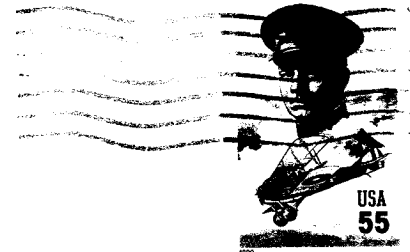
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