

# BAAC PAGE

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

## SEPTEMBER SONGS

By Richard S. Schiller

### Performers...



Jeremy Jeans



Thor Miao



Frank Panacci

BAAC ushered in its fall season in a very classic way, with classic accordion music. Bob Delgado welcomed about one hundred accordion enthusiasts to hear some great music. Prez Lou Soper in turn talked about various subjects and had us stand for a moment of silence in respect to the passing of fellow member George Armanino. He also touted a free upcoming workshop with our own Joe Smiell.

Lynn Ewing took over the MC duties and the music began with Lou Jacklich's young protégé Jeremy Jeans. Now 12 years old, Jeremy has improved much to become a fine young player, certainly one that will make it to national recognition in coming years if he continues his studies. With his proud teacher Lou looking on, Jeremy played his own arrangement of *Two Guitars*, then Lou's heralded *Granada*. His encore was another Jeans special of *Home On the Range*.

Jeremy's technique sparkled with fast chromatic runs, triple bellows shake and other keyboard gymnastics that showed he's been listening closely to his teacher. Great job Jeremy and Lou!

Val Kieser then presented a BAAC scholarship award to Jeremy, who graciously presented BAAC with a very nice thank you letter.

Thor Miao, another Lou Jacklich student entertained us with renditions of *Carioca*, *Jolly Cabbalero*, and *Czardas*. Thor is another young accordion enthusiast who, under Lou's tutelage, is on his way to becoming a fine player. Thanks Thor.

When it comes to classic accordion music at BAAC, no one exemplifies it in a finer way than our own Frank

Panacci. Frank started with Charles Magnante's arrangements of *Tea For Two* and *Gay Ranchero* (with a long bellows shake), and then treated us to a number not heard in a long time, *Trieste Overture*. Frank, always a delight to listen to, hasn't lost a step after an extended layoff. Thanks so much Frank.

The second part of the program was provided by our own BAAC Accordion Ensemble, ACE.

One of the things that makes this group so entertaining is the background that Joe Smiell provides about each piece. The group played some great sounding music that with Joe's intros became a very enjoyable music and total musical experience for us. *Under the Flag*, *Solvejg's Song*, *Kammenol Ostrow*, *Emperor Waltz*, *Oriental*, *British Grenadiers*, *Santa Lucia*, and *Calif of Baghdad*. Beautiful sounds from the pen of our Master Joe Smiell, and performed by our talented artists. The Ensemble includes: Aldo Argenti Jr; Peter di Bono; Mary-Alice Eldon; Lynn Ewing; Ron Harris; Val Kieser; Nora Mazzara; Franka Montoro; Bob Smith and Sharon Walters. Thank you all.

### September 2000

- Joe Smiell's Button Box Camp
- Clyde Forsman: An Accordion Life
- Accordion Etiquette
- And Two For Tea

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# BUTTONING UP A STORM AT SODA SPRINGS

By Valerie T. Kieser

I just returned from Joe Smiell's September 2000 Button Box Camp and am having trouble getting back down to earth! It was fabulous in every way, including beautiful weather the whole time.

Musically, the camp is absolutely first rate. Even with beginners, Joe stresses the subtleties of making music beautiful: phrasing (especially taking breaths so the listener is not overwhelmed with non-stop noise), dynamics, articulation. These are the things that make music a joy to listen to, but too many accordionists (including myself) often fail to incorporate them. Well, I've learned to listen to music with a different ear. Many of the finest accordionists we have heard forget to "take a breath" now and then. Just listen a while with this in mind and you'll see! I'm working hard on improving my own playing of both button box and accordion with these musical nuggets in mind, and I'm actually making progress! There is nothing like the feeling that your playing (and your sight-reading!) is finally improving! For this reason—I have to slip in a little plug here—I highly recommend that BAAC members interested in improving their accordion playing join Joe's BAAC Ensemble, which meets on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. YOU WILL LEARN ways to improve your playing—I guarantee it—and it's free!!

Joe writes new special music for every button box camp, after everyone is there and he has a "feel" for the group. Every person in camp must play something from that new camp music on Concert Night. You wouldn't believe how everyone progressed! Some people who had never even lifted a button box before actually played a piece or an exercise for concert night. Intermediate and advanced players (including myself) played pieces that, at the beginning of camp, they wouldn't have dreamed they could ever touch!

Wednesday afternoon of camp is "ditch day" when classes are suspended for a half-day (to



The gang at Joe Smiell's Button Box Camp

clear our heads) and everyone takes off in different directions. Some head for Reno, others go hiking or visit Donner Summit and Donner Museum. I and three others went to Squaw Valley and took the tram ride up to "high camp" above the valley, where there is a gorgeous swimming pool and spa, an ice skating rink, a lovely restaurant, and a museum about the 1960 winter Olympics. It was a beautiful, warm day and we didn't need the jackets we all lugged along thinking it would be cold and windy up on top! On the way back we had dinner at the brand new Ice Lakes Hotel and Restaurant on Serene Lakes near Soda Springs. Thursday it was back to work, all refreshed, to learn new exercises and new music

Joe wrote for us in the intervening hours.

Joe's son, Joseph ("Joe Jr."), of course was also there the whole time, working hard at the computer, and teaching elements of music theory to the beginners, and showing them the "ins and outs" of the button box. Joseph's

beautiful bride, Sally Ann, is a star player and also helped us with our playing. She is a very talented and versatile young lady, and we all enjoy her so much. And what a voice she has! She sings and yodels like an angel. We are thrilled to have her among us.

There is so much to learn about music—even though, as Joe told us, it is impossible to know it all, no matter who you are or how long or hard you study—and button box camp is a real musical learning experience no matter what instrument you play.

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*There is nothing like the feeling that your playing (and your sight-reading!) is finally improving!*

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# AND TWO FOR TEA

By Paul A. Magistretti

T. S. Eliot said that April is the cruelest month, but last April wasn't bad. BAAC had a dual concert by Øivind Farnen and Jörgen Sundevist that was terrific. Along with great music we also had a chance to witness the two main traditions of the concert accordion as well as the resultant instrument designs that evolved accordingly (pun). Øivind, a fine example of European training played a Zero Sette bayan and Jörgen, a consummate American player (via Sweden) by way of Anthony Galla-Rini, played a Petosa piano accordion. Of course, we immediately recognized they played dissimilar instruments. Øivind's bayan had buttons on both sides and Jörgen's Petosa had the familiar (for us) piano keys on the treble side along with the usual buttons for the bass. Øivind's treble had a range of 64 notes compared to Jörgen's 43 (he has an extended keyboard). Also, Øivind's bass had a converter switch which changed it mechanically from a Stradella system (which most of us play) to a system chromatically arranged in the B system (mirroring his right hand) which produced a range of 58 notes, giving him a broad tonal range and the ability to play any keyboard music without transcription. During his first selections Jörgen played his instrument with a Stradella bass system, but he later changed his entire bass component for a free bass system that gave him much the same facility with his left hand that Øivind had. Albeit, Øivind had one further feature: the outer three rows of bass buttons were stepped down about an 8<sup>th</sup> of an each per row, which allowed him to use his thumb.

Sometimes there is confusion about the so-called C and B systems for the right hand of the bayan, or chromatic accordion (systems sometimes referred to by the German word *griff*, meaning grip, ergo B griff or C griff). The Russians, Scandinavians and Finns tend to play the B griff and the Italians, French and Americans the C griff. In our club experience Veikko Ahvenainen, Lips, Semenyov, Stas Venglevski, Alex Yaskin play B system and Peter Soave plays the C system. Each system has its own proponents and essentially the difference is that on the C system C, A, G flat and E flat are in the second row, while on the B system B, A flat, F and D are in the second row (the C group is in the first row in the B system & the B group is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row on the C system. Although most bayans have five rows of keys, the first three rows contain all the notes, so the last two rows (closest to the grill) are repeats. In the B system, the C group and B group are the repeats. In the C system the row containing G, E, D flat and B flat and the C group are repeated. Am I losing you? I'll sum up: the B system gives you repeats in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> rows of C, A, G flat, E flat, F, D, B, A flat; the C system gives you repeats of G, E, D flat, B flat, C, A, G flat and E flat.

What I've observed is that B players seem to be able to play with their wrist falling in a natural downward angle and gain a certain extra velocity on chromatic runs while tending to sometimes play with four fingers. (This may be a holdover from when small diatonic accordions had a thumb loop. The

thumb was held stationary and supported the accordion instead of shoulder straps so the treble only had four fingers available). The C system players use the thumb more, although with conservatory trained B system players we see less of this ethnic four-fingered behavior. I've heard it said that the B system can facilitate playing difficult runs and passages and the C system facilitates chords. However, watching Peter Soave, Veikko and Stas play it's hard to see any differences in speed, facility and accuracy, etc.—although I do notice that Peter uses his thumb more and rarely if ever resorts to keeping his thumb fixed at the edge of the keyboard while playing with four fingers. It seems to me, however, that if a C griff player realizes that the B system has his C lineup in the first row (instead of the 2<sup>nd</sup>), then he could just move over one row and have a C system configuration, although he wouldn't be able to find the repeat keys he wants in the same row, or even have the same repeated notes. Similarly, a B system player could find his B configuration in the 3<sup>rd</sup> row of the C system keyboard (instead of the 2<sup>nd</sup>) and proceed from there, but again not finding the repeat rows the same or in the same spot (which in this case would be in the first two rows). Really confused now?

I found with my very limited experience with the C system that in contrast to the piano keyboard I was better able to find notes without looking at the keyboard (in fact, you'll notice chromatic players often hold the keys far in front of them and never look). Also, I noted that the keyboard was closer to the center of my body, so I didn't have my arm extended to the right or have to off-set the entire accordion to the left (you'll notice piano keyboards due to their width and placement are quite a bit farther to the right, tending to tense, if not cock the shoulder and wrist and change the center of the instrument's balance both on your lap, or standing. I think some of this piano/accordion's off-centeredness is the reason so many accordionists have back trouble. The entire accordion has to be shifted to your left and your treble arm extended to the right; then, the weight of the bellows falls away to the left and is very off-balanced. Even seated you'll notice a bayan player has the entire bass component closer to the center of his body, even with the bellows extended. I think that asymmetrical weight distribution can be more a source of back trouble than the weight itself—you know what it's like to carry a heavy suitcase in one hand and nothing in the other and what that does to your back. You're far better off with a balanced load at five times the weight.

Playing a chromatic and hand spread: a piano accordion player can span an octave +/- a note or two, a chromatic player can reach two octaves +/- several notes, so that within the normal spread of a chromatic player's fingers many more notes are at hand. I remember Peter Soave saying once when he picked up a piano accordion after not playing one for a while that his only problem would be getting used to spreading his

*continued on page 6*

# ACCORDION ETIQUETTE (The Art and Manners of Jamming)

By Kristofer Nelson

As a student of the accordion, I know that someday I'll be good enough to play along with other musicians. As for now, I can only look on and imagine the day when I'll be playing with the "Real Players." I can already tell that there are many different styles and levels of players and music. Some folks play various ethnic music (Italian, Slovene, German, Jewish), others might play a certain genre of music (Classical, Jazz, Popular). Some folks know their music theory backwards and forwards, while others learned their music by ear and taught themselves how to play. I've been sitting back and watching for quite some time and I was wondering; "Is there etiquette to these 'jam sessions' and how does one learn the rules of the game?" Being at least a somewhat polite person myself, I wrote down what I thought might be the top five rules of the Jam Session. I took these rules in hand and humbly presented them to some of the best accordion players and teachers I know. This article presents these five rules, and the modifications and recommendations made by the "Pros."

My five rules are as follows. When presented with an opportunity to sit in on a jam session, you should:

1. Know the song. If you don't know the song ask for the chord progression.
2. Ask permission to play. It can be as simple as "Can I sit in with you folks?"
3. Wait to "Get the nod" before taking a lead solo. It's common courtesy. Otherwise you'll have musicians playing "over" each other.
4. Listen to the other players and compare your playing with theirs. Adapt to the group. Ask yourself if you are playing "with" the other players, or "at" them.
5. Check your ego at the door. You're a good player—only if you share the spotlight.

Now, taking each rule one at a time, let's see what the "Pros" have to say.

## 1. Know the song.

"Do not play if you don't know the song. Don't play obscure songs. Know the key the group is playing in and play harmony when possible." *-Tom Cordoni*

"...to know the tune is the key. Knowing a song involves knowing not only the melodic structure but also the harmonic structure. Additionally, one should have a repertoire of harmonic substitutions and melodic devices at one's fingertips, something that takes a lot of study and preparation, before getting into a session." *-Jim Wadowick*

"If you don't know the song, don't play along. It is improper to ask for the chord progressions. Build a library of songs you know. There are many common songs that people jam on. Ask around and find out what they are. Also know the standard key for each song." *-Lou Jacklich*

"The chord progressions should be known of course but 99.9999% do not know chords well enough to improvise and many have trouble with meter." *-Gary Dahl*

"Pick a tune that you know inside out. That means you know the changes the melody, counter melody, basic chord substitution, ability to transpose to other keys, etc." *-Ron Borelli*

## 2. Ask permission to play.

"...many times the "unprepared type" doesn't ask, he just gets into the session and messes things up." *-Jim Wadowick*

"Ask to be allowed to sit in." *-Lou Soper*

All the responses were unanimous, you must get permission to sit in when others are playing. Jumping into a group session is a breach of the highest order and considered rude.

## 3. Wait to "Get the nod" before taking a lead solo.

"Play softly until given the nod to take the lead." *-Lou Jacklich*

"Don't overstay your welcome or overextend your solo, if you have musically made your statement it is probably enough." *-Ron Borelli*

"Wait until someone tells you to "take" a chorus. Play only one full chorus, unless you are asked to play a second one." *-Lou Soper*

## 4. Listen to the other players and compare your playing with theirs.

"Do not play loud. Keep the beat. Don't rush or drag it." *-Tom Cordoni*

"I might add (you implied it in #3, 4 and 5) that people who do know the song tend to belt it out as loud as possible and in master switch so that others can't hear themselves play or even think! Jamming is not a loudness competition." *-Val Kieser*

"Jam with the bassoon or clarinet switch only. Playing in the master switch blows others out of the water (again; Play softly until given the nod to take the lead)." *-Lou Jacklich*

"Make sure you can hear the other player, if you can't, you're playing too loud." *-Peter DiBono*

"Listen to the other player, he may have a good idea developing into a nice arrangement, and it may inspire you." *-Peter DiBono*

"If it is a group of accordions they should only use the bassoon or clarinet switches...this will decrease the clashes of different tunings. Never, never use any other switch!" *-Gary Dahl*

"Most accordionists, for some reason, try to play louder than the other guy and it turns out to be noise!" *-Gary Dahl*

"Listen and phrase with the players. Be aware of when the song is going to end." *-Ron Borelli*

*continued on page 7*

# CLYDE FORSMAN: AN ACCORDION LIFE

By Steve Mobia

What's an 85-year-old singer to do when a young lady throws her panties on-stage or another asks to have his baby? It's all a part of the road life of Clyde Forsman who still travels with the riotous band *Those Darn Accordions* or *TDA*.

It's pretty amazing that Forsman's voice is still clear at his age—let alone that he can travel across country lugging his full size Hohner. But when he whips off his shirt to expose his completely tattooed chest and back and launches into a cover of Rod Stewart's tune *Do You Think I'm Sexy?*, the crowds go crazy. "If this had happened to me when I was a lot younger, I don't think I could contain myself. But I've led a good clean life. Haven't strayed too far; never cheated on my wife."

It's just one aspect of Clyde who is a charter member of the Bay Area Accordion Club, joining in 1990. His star lifestyle hasn't gone to his head and he is very approachable with a razor sharp memory for names and details.

A native Californian, Clyde is the oldest of four brothers born on a farm in Denair. His first free reed experience was in grammar school when he was

introduced to a Hohner Marine Band Harmonica. Afterward, he discovered that a friend's sister had a Cajun accordion and that it played just like a harmonica. Buying it from the girl for five dollars, he fell in love with the accordion. His classmates enjoyed the 9-mile bus ride to school when Clyde brought the instrument along to play.

It wasn't until he was 17 that he encountered his first piano accordion—a 12 bass purchased through the Montgomery Ward catalogue. It was around this time that he and a few friends formed a "hillbilly" band, which performed for country fairs and local venues. A major mentor in his life was Anton Roubicek who was a pipe organist in Turlock. "Ruby" promised Clyde he'd teach him all the important aspects of music in ten lessons using his own unique method. To this day Clyde uses Roubicek's condensed booklet *Mathematical Keyboard Harmony* when he wants to teach music to an occasional student.

Though he loved music, he was talked out of studying it by a counselor while in Modesto Junior College in 1939. Instead he made the practical choice of Accounting, a subject which he promptly failed. A series of jobs ensued including working in the Sierra for the Department of Forestry and shoveling ore 1,000 feet underground as a "mucker" in a Coulterville gold mine. Later, he moved to the Bay Area in search of work, quitting his previous job just two days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

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He wasn't drafted during the war because of a lifelong affliction, diabetes. Late 1941 found Clyde working at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard building wooden "whaleboats." Afterward he built tugboats and 120 foot "sub chasers" in Sausalito. Finding he could make a little more as a marine electrician, he joined the local union and wired gunboats and submarines. But when the war ended, he lost his job. The experience of working with wood, however, gave him entry into the post war building boom. "I didn't know a stud from a joist," Clyde says.

Though he was fired from a few jobs, "seat of the pants" learning took hold and carpentry became his occupation. His woodworking was also put to use in a private pastime, making marionettes and putting on plays with them. One of his puppets is featured on the cover of the TDA album *No Strings Attached*.

After taking a civil service exam, he got what was to be his favorite job, repairing cable cars for MUNI at their famous



Washington and Mason station. Though he hated to quit, at age 65 they retired him with pension.

When in 1989 Linda Seekins ("Big Lou") placed a newspaper ad asking for accordionists to show up at San Francisco's Paradise Lounge for an audition, Clyde's life would once again be changed. Out of the crowd

that arrived, *Those Darn Accordions* was formed. It originally was twelve strong and included Tom Torriglia and Ron Borelli. Forsman was in with them from the beginning. After a year or two of playing gigs, Paul Rodgers joined as singer and songwriter, eventually becoming their band leader and the group size was reduced for country wide touring. The latest incarnation of the group has been pared down even more, losing regulars Art Peterson and *TDA* originator Big Lou who has started performing on her own. They can't do without Clyde though who continues to belt out Jimi Hendrix's *Fire!* He tries to stay out of the personal politics of the band.

*Those Darn Accordions* had another effect however, uniting some local players and planting the seeds for the Bay Area Accordion Club, which was established shortly afterwards (5/7/90). Clyde appeared and gave a speech with the others at City Hall to promote the accordion as the City's official instrument. As most of you know, the first piano accordion built in the United States was built in San Francisco, which was to boast twelve accordion factories during the 1930s.

*continued on page 6*

## **Two for Tea** *continued*

fingers again—however, I couldn't see that he had any problem at all.

So, how did we arrive at these two dissimilar configurations—piano/accordion and bayan? Well, in Europe the accordion kept the traditional treble buttons from its diatonic squeezebox origins and expanded the idea to its present 122 note configuration. There was a two-fold impetus for this in Europe. One was ergonomic: to keep the facility of buttons; two there was a compelling need to expand the instrument's range. It's no secret that Europe has a greater interest in classical and modern (atonal, etc.) types of music—there would consequently be a greater urge to play that kind of music on any and all instruments, including accordions. The abiding European classical/modern urge would naturally carry the instrument into universities, conservatories and concert halls. Such a cultural climate would increase the sheer numbers of accordion players and the culture would further determine that their interest should lie in serious, complicated music. Also, once developed the instrument was generally accepted in Europe as equal to any other solo/orchestral instrument. It's safe to say that throughout Europe in tiny towns and villages the many existing chamber groups were only too willing to accept accordions into their ranks. European musicians fully considered accordion players musicians of the first rank (which they are) appreciating that said accordion players would be well schooled in Bach, Mozart, *et al*, for European accordionists paid their dues struggling with the expected curriculum of all keyboard artists by wood-shedding Hanon, Czerny, Bach's Preludes and Fugues and Scarlatti, etc.

It was an evolutionary idea to extend the range and facility of button boxes. Obviously, the little instruments were severely limited in their various configurations. Most could only play a limited range of notes and were restricted to certain keys—two, three or four at most per instrument; that means at the very least you'd need three separate instruments to play in all twelve keys. Beyond key restrictions there was a tremendous limitation of range for the treble and an even greater restriction of the bass—one need only look at the twelve or so bass buttons on a buttonbox to appreciate you're not going to find a Bach fugue's worth of music there (nor were you intended to).

Another factor: the fondness of great composers in adapting and interpolating folk music into their serious compositions

(Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Bartok, Liszt, *ad infinitum*) may have come into play. If simple ethnic folk music was interpolated, variegated and reconceived by giants of classical music, why shouldn't the simple, diatonic accordion that originally rendered such folk melodies be reciprocally reconceived to equal what, say, Brahms had done compositionally with a Hungarian rhapsody? Since there was extensive cross-fertilization between folk and classical music, sooner or later the notion of bringing the instrument along had to occur to music lovers—and more importantly, instrument makers. Nowhere was that more true than in the former Soviet Union with its widespread love of the accordion—you might call it the instrument of the Russian soul. So, first the buttonbox was given the ability to play all twelve keys and then supplied with an expanded treble and bass (free bass) sufficient to satisfy an old crank like Beethoven (had he been around for the appearance of the final product *circa* 1930 *something*). The success of the bayan with free bass is apparent by how many artists perform the works of classical and modern composers using this fine and flexible instrument. Also, by how many modern composers like Sofia Gubadailina have been intrigued with its sound, range and facility and have composed for it—alas, nearly all this creative interest has been exclusively done in Europe, where concerts are performed by accordions and classical and modern works get played and listened to. We have fewer examples of composer interest in the accordion in America (other than Anthony Galla-Rini). Paul Creston was a major composer (there are others, perhaps Milhaud), who composed for the accordion, but Creston's Accordion Concerto rarely gets played. Peter Soave has tried for years to interest symphony orchestras in presenting the Creston work, but with little success.

In terms of getting the accordion serious classical/concert recognition, Gall-Rini has to be recognized for his tremendous influence and achievement. His adapting and modifying the vaudeville driven piano accordion to his own serious artistic purposes was admirable in every way. His development of bass techniques for giving the Stradella system the ability to play three or more octaves by interposing switches as he moved up and down the scale was brilliant and technically amazing. But the free bass system had to eventually win out, because having 58 notes at a player's fingertips without having to utilize the

*continued on page 11*

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## **Clyde Forsman** *continued*

For those who wonder about Clyde's dramatic tattoos, he got them at when he was almost sixty. A friend of his ran a tattoo parlor in the Mission district and wanted to do a large-scale tattoo. Clyde volunteered and got both his back and front done for free. Even his wife Eveline got into it with a couple of tattoos of her own.

Recovering from his first wife's sudden departure and divorce, Eveline was "like a clear light in the fog" for Clyde. They married in 1954, have remained loving partners and raised two sons. Though she is not partial to the accordion, it

was while they were visiting Italy that she bought Clyde a full-featured Brandoni, which remains Clyde's most treasured instrument.

Perhaps it's his genes that's kept him going strong (2 aunts lived over 100) or perhaps it's his constant participation in groups and activities. When young he was called "buzzard bait" by the jocks in school due to his being thin and diabetic. "Now all those football players are in the cemetery and I'm still here—I don't know why."

## Accordion Etiquette *continued*

"Don't play too loud. Don't play the melody when somebody else is playing the chorus. Don't rush the tempo or skip measures when you play a solo." *-Lou Soper*

"Decide at the outset, that whoever is playing the lead/solo, also plays the bass part and the other player does not play the bass. It sounds terrible to have different bass parts going on at the same time." *-Peter DiBono*

### 5. Check your ego at the door.

"When you join the group, remember you are not a soloist. Jamming is musical conversation. Keep your talking to a minimum." *-Tom Cordoni*

"Don't correct another player for not playing what you are playing. Don't blow your own horn, let the other musicians do that for you." *-Lou Soper*

"If one person is the instigator or wants to be in charge, that person should specifically give each of the other participants an opportunity to lead the group in a song of his/her choice ("Mary, what song would you like to play?"), so that no one person "hogs" the spotlight. The person whose song will be played tells aloud the name of the song and what key it is in (i.e., *El Rio Drive*, key of C)." *-Val Kieser*

"Say thank you to the leader and the musicians for sitting in." *-Ron Borelli*

In addition I would like to include further tips from these fine players:

"If you don't have your ax with you ask for permission to use a player's instrument, but don't push it if the answer is no. Respect the instrument and the owner's wish." *-Ron Borelli*

"I've never been too much for jam sessions. But I remember my first attempts many years ago in Chicago, I tried to sit in with a jazz group and when I told them I played the accordion, I was ignored most of the time." *-Art Van Damme*

"Have business cards or a pen and pencil. If things go well other players will ask for your card. If things clicked for you ask for their business card or number." *-Ron Borelli*

"...be careful that you don't get too structured. The idea of jamming is for everyone to bring what they can to the jam, not to provide a flawless performance capable of being recorded. In the rare circumstances when everything clicks though I think that a jam can be just about the most incredible musical happening. Some of the best and most memorable playing has happened after meetings when a few people jammed." *-Bob Berta*

"Wait until the song is finished to ask a question on what you played." *-Lou Soper*

"If you don't know something in the tune that was played—a Riff, chord change, substitution. Ask the musician, Musicians generally like to help one another." *-Ron Borelli*

"Jamming can be a lot of fun, or a real torture depending on who is in the session and how amenable the players are to each other's personalities. I played in one Dixieland band for years that was the joy of my life. The personalities in the band were amenable, they respected each other's abilities, and knew exactly what to play and when." *-Jim Wadowick*

"I believe there are specific "jamming" rules but I've never read them as such. Common sense and a little sensitivity to others should do the trick! In my book, it's supposed to be a fun thing where everyone has the chance to participate equally." *-Val Kieser*

"Your Do's and Don'ts are very good. It would be nice if all musicians gave some time to consider your remarks before sitting in." *-Art Van Damme*

In closing I would like to state that the intent of this article is not to be controversial, but rather to open up lines of communication on a subject that I felt needed addressing for my education as well as helping to establish a useful guideline for others in my situation. Many thanks to the professionals who contributed to this article. Each brought their years of experience to the table for our consideration, and for that I thank them.



BAAC's Accordion Club Ensemble (ACE) performs at the September meeting.

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# A DON'T MISS AT BAAC

By Don Nurisso

*[We will be hearing more about the two Guest Performers who will play for us on November 8th at our combined meeting/concert, but we all know Don Nurisso as one of the most gifted members of BAAC and when he heard Mike Alongi was going to play he sent the following]:*

About 4 years ago, my wife and I visited Chicago, my wife's hometown. Lee Sash, the widow of Leon Sash [*perhaps the greatest jazz artist of all time*], graciously arranged a dinner at a local eatery in Northern Chicago. Local accordionists invited included Jerry Siegler, Leon's former student, Lindy Kao [*a great player who recently passed away*], and several others, including Mike Alongi. Mike is a cousin of Bart Beninco.

Anyhow, after an informal dinner, they played their accordions. I had the good fortune to

bring a video-recorder with me, and recorded the two-hour session.

It was one of the most exciting performances I have ever witnessed. They played solo, duos, trios, in all styles. While all played extremely well, and several of them are included in our Accordion Book from Texas, Mike was, in my opinion, the best of the group.

In several trips to Chicago, after that time, I was invited to Mike's home, where we played several duets. I brought several pieces of music with me, pieces which I had struggled with for several months—and Mike sight-read them, playing them better than me.

BAAC has the rare privilege of hearing a truly exceptional artist on the accordion. Don't miss this performance.

## 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.*

### A Cure for Hiccups

By Mike Zampiceni

Does your accordion sound like it has the hiccups? That may be because you're changing your air direction while holding a note. Commonly referred to as "cutting the air," I regard this as one of the cardinal transgressions of accordion playing. Yet, more players than not do this. The only time you should be holding down a note while changing air direction should occur when you're doing a bellows shake.

You have to think of the accordion as a wind instrument, such as the sax or a singer, for that matter. If you were to sing a musical phrase, such as "I left my heart in San Francisco," would you breathe in the middle of any of these words?

Of course not. Then, why do players constantly do this with the accordion?

Think you can't apply this principle to the accordion? The process is actually simple, but it takes some practice, especially if you have never learned the technique. To change air direction properly, you have to do two things instantaneously. When you find you need to change direction, wait until you're ready to play the next note on your right hand. When you play the next note, you should change air direction at the exact same time.

Try to experiment with this technique. If you've mastered it, your phrases should sound seamless and not sound like your accordion has an incurable case of the hiccups.

### LETTER TO VALERIE KIESER

Dear Val, Thank you for the copy of the BAAC newsletter. Enjoyed reading about your visit with Maria von Trapp. I like the whole newsletter so much that I sent a \$25.00 check for membership. Yes, you're stuck with me.

Yours truly,  
Sundi O'Mara,  
Rocky River, Ohio



## NEWS RELEASE

BAAC's Peter DiBono performed with the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, Craig Smith, conductor (along with the America Bach Soloists, Jeffrey Thomas, music director) on 9/21, 9/22, 9/23 & 9/24. The Berkeley Symphony played at Zellerbach Hall for the Mark Morris Dance Group's production of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* and Henry Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas*. The production was previously presented in New York with great success, "Virgil Thomson's engaging score captures all the freshness and poetry of Gertrude Stein's libretto, weaving a rich tapestry of music styles to tell the story of 16th century Spanish mystics. *Dido & Aeneas* is a unique blend of dance and theatre set to Purcell's 1689 score. Morris himself dances in the tragic story of the Queen of Carthage and her doomed love for the warrior Aeneas."

## BAAC'S SURVEY ON COTATI

The consensus of opinion was that no matter how great Contino is we should have a break. After all, it doesn't promote awareness and appreciation of the accordion to narrowly define it. Yes, Dick has a following, he's a nice guy, has a fine act and emphatically plays the accordion; however, he does pretty much the same act each year (shirt comes off at the same time, etc.). Once when his sideman didn't work out and he played solo it was better—but it's more of a novelty act than a musical experience, the accordion being a prop. Of Contino style performers, Tony Lovello might be better, but some felt *headlining* showmen of that kind, so-called stars, who essentially do a Vegas lounge act makes a defining statement about the accordion that was the very thing the Festival was supposed to correct. In light of that, some feel the Festival has become the exact opposite of what it was intended to be. It was thought there was an increasing lack of purpose and identity, so that the Cotati Accordion Festival is becoming just another summer enterprise having less and less to do with the accordion. There was a general opinion that the line-up of performers with a few exceptions was less challenging and diverse and that there was a tendency to insert too many novelty acts. Some felt that the Marilyn Monroe act and Sourdough Slim were amusing but that they would be just as well suited to generic summer fairs that weren't supposedly dedicated to the accordion. Some members remembered with nostalgia when the festival featured solo performers like Galla-Rini, Lou Fanucchi, Leo Aquino, Peter Soave, Stas Venglevski, Frank Marocco, Art Van Damme, Ken Ohlendorf—virtuoso performers all—and it seemed to be *all about the accordion*. Some felt that an accordion festival should feature 90% accordion soloists (or duos & trios) and not ensembles of instruments in which the accordion is a minor player. Some BAAC members thought that Cotati should decide if it's an accordion festival or summer showbiz. Some said, the festival lost its soul when Boggio was marginalized (dying later) and that it's all about egos and profits and not about art and the accordion. Some missed the early excitement of accordions everywhere, taking over the town and the event being really

dedicated to the instrument and its music. This year's poster was singled out for negative comment. Some members said Cotati has no focus. Others said Cotati lacks conviction that the accordion is an important instrument, "They wouldn't treat the piano or violin the way they do the accordion." Some said the Festival showed a general lack of taste in music. There was an opinion that legitimate accordion artists were finding less of a place at Cotati. Some said the producers of Cotati seemed to believe that since lots of people got up and jumped around during Polkacide, but only a small group listened attentively to Peter Soave, that they'd rather book Polkacide. Members said that the Festival didn't believe it had any responsibility to educate and inform, just make money. Consequently, some members said that the ambiance was more and more dominated by novelties, gimmicks, noise and a general pandering to the lowest common denominator. Some felt Cotati was betraying the accordion by playing to the public's pervasive low opinion of the instrument. It was thought that the few serious performers were more than undone by the large noisy groups in which the accordion was incidental, minimal (& sometimes a joke). Some thought there were fewer accordion people showing up—attendance by BAAC members was down. Members felt people who love the accordion were being driven out. Some said, "Why not make Cotati even more popular and eliminate the accordion entirely." Some said the Festival would be less hypocritical and make more money if it became the Cotati Electric Guitar Festival, did rock & roll, punk, hip-hop and other crowd pleasers. The bottom line seemed to be that what exists now no longer serves its original purpose; that it's becoming no different than any other summer fair. Of course, its original purpose may have always been just to put on an event of some kind to make money—in which case, the accordion was just a gimmick and there was never any intent to promote and educate people about this wonderful instrument. Someone suggested we should start a new festival in Petaluma and focus more on what we thought the original concept was (though it may have never been) foregoing any carnival or Las Vegas atmosphere and being honest in our intentions and purpose—maybe make an honest dollar—and perhaps schedule it before Cotati.

## GET OUT YOUR ACCORDION & GO!

**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**, which is an entirely different group, also affiliated with BAAC). The **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 would like to encourage people to participate in both these groups. **BAAC Ensemble** and **BAAC Fun Band**. We have loads of fun and learn a lot at the same time. There is no experience like group playing; it is entirely different from individual playing, and you needn't be a terrific player to join in. Give it a try and see. You'll thank me. -Valerie Kieser

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



September already. This year is really going fast. It has been a *funderful* year as we have accomplished many things. Our new meeting place is really beautiful and the new PA system is a plus.

Our website is introducing the whole world to BAAC. The Art Van Damme 80th birthday tribute, our picnic, the Cotati Festival, plus the "Day of the Accordion" at the Cannery are events we sponsored. We awarded seven lifetime memberships.

Our professional guest artists have been outstanding. We can be proud of what we have done and the respect we receive from many organizations

Our needs never end, however. Treasurer Mike Zampiceni has sold his home and is moving out of the area. We need somebody to replace him. If you have bookkeeping experience, we need your help. So, please let us know if you are available so the Executive Board can approve.

Also, John Seckman has such a big work load at his school, that we need help in the layout of our newsletter, BAAC PAGE. It takes about 10 hours a month to do this necessary task and John is looking for one of his students or somebody from our club. He is willing to assist you if you volunteer. Please help us, if you can.

Very important, please note: The November meeting at the Patio Español will be the second Wednesday, which is November 8th. Our Professional Guests were not available for November 1, so we accommodated them and moved the meeting to November 8th. Mark your calendars!

I'm off to Minneapolis to visit my son and will be looking forward to seeing you on October 4th. Keep squeezin' and be proud you play the accordion.

— Lou Soper

### Would You Like to Join BAAC?

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## Two for Tea *continued*

interposition of switches didn't take a genius like Galla-Rini to master. Also, how could one use such a brilliant but complicated technique in playing Bach fugues? To his great credit I've heard Maestro Galla-Rini say, after judging the Coupe Mondial, that if he had it to do over again, he would choose to play a free bass bayan for its greater ease, facility and capacity in playing any keyboard music without transcription.

So, we come to America: here, the same, ethnic, European *volks-boxen* got spliced to a piano keyboard for family enjoyment, ease of interface and the thrill of modernity. The USA was a new country and demanded new ways and new instruments. It wasn't the American way to hang onto the old country's baggage of culture, language and diatonic button boxes. At the turn of the century immigrants to America wanted to become Americans and if they struggled with limited success, with unyielding accents and hard-to-change habits, they were determined that the next generation would be real Americans. So, it was easy to leave behind the tiny diatonic button machines to fade away in the mists of time. We see assimilation played out in the fact that many first generation Americans retained little knowledge of their parents' country, traditions, language—and in general had little or no interest in old country ways. Old timers themselves would often say that they had no longings for the old country, since it was full of unpleasant reminders of hunger, war and hopelessness. Well, if the parents wanted their kids to be American kids and the kids wanted to be American, the times were right for a new kind of instrument.

Now, despite complete assimilation, is it ever possible to escape the primal power of accordion music? Every culture in the world has some form of accordion music in its soul. So, an accordion's sound and music stayed in everyone's heart, even if the words weren't on their tongues and the variously configured diatonic instruments weren't in their hands—except in certain enclaves (middle Europeans and Scandinavians in the midwest with Chemnitzers and coal miners in Pennsylvania with their Helikons). Then, too, apart from new immigrants and first generation children not wanting to hang onto old style instruments, the sheer diversity of the keyboard patterns became mysteries outside their cultures. If one didn't live near an old-timer who knew where the notes were and how to make the thing work, how could a child learn the instrument? Ethnic accordions seemed to have interfaces that were as inscrutable as Egyptian hieroglyphics before the Rosetta stone was discovered. What could you do, if you wanted to hear the accordion; especially, if you wanted to hear your child play one? Well, with a piano or small organ in every parlor, there was an instantly understandable interface available that was familiar to one and all. Any idiot (even me) could pick out a tune on a piano keyboard.

I remember when my uncle was drafted and about to go off to a shooting war, I said, "Uncle Ed, I know a soldier's song" and I rushed to my aunt's parlor organ and without knowing what I was doing pumped the pedals and played *Taps*. You could have heard a pin drop. I heard the coffee cup rattling in my uncle's hand. I heard my aunt swallow from across the room. Did my playing move her to tears? Was I a virtuoso? With the happy ignorance of a six year old I tortured the tune to its end and turned after the last of the death knell and said, "That was for *you*, Uncle Ed!" Fortunately, my uncle survived, so I gladly disavow any psychic powers.

With a piano keyboard interface, any kid could play a scale, figure out a tune and even get lessons from a piano teacher. It was natural for a piano keyboard to become the accordion's *lingua franca* in a diverse, populist, non-classical music culture like ours. You have to remember that long before the

*continued on next page*

## Two for Tea continued

advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some early accordions had piano keys (I've seen pictures from the mid-nineteenth century)—this was long before the San Francisco connection. Remember, too, there were examples to be found on pianos, organs, harmoniums, celestas and other keyboards. But grafting piano keys on an accordion and making them stick could very well have been SF's innovation, if not invention. It was a good and natural idea for such an ethnically diverse place as The City. For San Francisco has always had a fascination with bright new things and was from Gold Rush days a town with lots of ethnic diversity, a diversity that rubbed together generating lots of creative heat. Thus, it was less likely here than anywhere that ethnic groups would hang onto their keyboard configurations (from whatever country). San Francisco wasn't a place for balkanizing the accordion, for assassinating other accordions just because they didn't play like true Slovenians, or some other flavor. No, our City was all about being American and our diverse ethnic population with accordion music in their souls would love having a real democratic, all-American accordion.

America's passion for the piano/accordion eventually became so monomaniacal that an early virtuoso like Frosini had to disguise his three row chromatic keyboard look like piano keys—we see some of these three-row wolves in ivory clothing in historical photos, collections and museums. Actually, it wasn't long ago that the late, great jazz artist, Leon Sash of Chicago, played a three row chromatic that looked piano-fied. By the way, if you ever come across any of Sash's records and you have an ear for Jazz, do yourself a favor and buy them and be blown away! Anyway, the tremendous popularity of the newly created, essentially American instrument was a Yankee-Doodle natural with every late nineteenth century American home (even modest ones) having a piano or small organ in the parlor. The piano keys made the accordion instantly modern, accessible to all and perfectly marketable in a dynamic society—in one fell swoop it was audience friendly, playable, beholden to nobody's European background and as seductive to pick up as a puppy.

Masters of the new piano/accordion (we don't *slash* it anymore) were soon dazzling the American public—we could compile a long list of brilliant performers, but to be sure everyone's list would include men like Pietro Deiro, Charles Magnante and ultimately Anthony Galla-Rini. As I've touched on above, Galla-Rini more than anyone took the piano/accordion from vaudeville to the concert stage, developing techniques, artistry and the instrument itself to a point where he demonstrated a level of achievement comparable to any musician on any instrument in any epoch of musical history. Despite Maestro Galla-Rini's efforts, however, the piano/accordion seems to have spent most of its professional life on the wicked stage and even today rarely can find its way into an American concert hall. It may be that the initial definition of the accordion in America as entertain-

ment lite has kept it from the American concert stage. Fairly or unfairly most Americans conceive of the piano/accordion as something defined by Lawrence Welk and/or Dick Contino (fine musicians within their spheres) with a little *Lady of Spain* & *Beer Barrel Polka* tossed in—which is fine as far as it goes, but hardly definitive of the potential of this great instrument.

Even today in America preconceptions of the accordion are such that even a superb artist like Peter Soave, even after changing from the piano/accordion to the bayan, has never been able to achieve the recognition—and more importantly work—equal to his talent. He has had modest bookings with symphony orchestras and despite excellent reviews and appreciative audiences just hasn't been accorded just due. Interestingly, he has since incorporated the bandoneon into his performance repertoire and is doing better, primarily because of the defining interest in Astor Piazzolla, who apparently has raised everyone's consciousness regarding the concertina-like bandoneon; it's

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*...in one fell swoop it was audience friendly, playable, beholden to nobody's European background and as seductive to pick up as a puppy.*

---

considered a serious concert instrument (albeit having its roots in the dives and brothels of Buenos Aires). Piazzolla's phenomenal success has succeeded in generating crossover appeal, too; the prominence of his record sales has incited performers on other instruments, international stars like Yo Yo Ma and a whole list of classical performers on violins, flutes, cellos, pianos and guitars, etc., to jump on the band wagon. In fact, the Piazzolla phenomenon has grown

by leaps and bounded across areas of taste breaking down barriers between classical, Jazz, modern and tango—and caught the bandoneon in the undertow.

Well, it's too late to keep this short. Let me wind up here. BAAC can remember April and be glad—we had an interesting and multi-level experience. We not only enjoyed a great concert but we saw a living review of the history of the concert accordion, including its physical and technical development as well as the accumulative artistry necessary to play it.

We'll have a similar opportunity during our combined meeting/concert on November 8<sup>th</sup> (mark your calendars; it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday). We have a concert planned with Stas Venglevski and Mike Alongi. These two fine musicians will mostly play duets and solos of great accordion music; waltzes, tangos, polkas—many of which will be new, traditional style compositions by Stas. Here, again, we'll see side by side the two traditions: the Russian conservatory trained Stas (on bayan) and the American trained virtuoso, Mike (on piano/accordion). If you've heard their CD, you know that they play so well together it sounds like a single player with four hands. Yet, while they've come from vastly different backgrounds and traditions and their instruments diverged from a common ancestor into distant cousins, like gorillas and chimpanzees, they've arrived at a beautiful meeting of hearts and minds—which just goes to show, as Emily Latella used to say (Gilda Radner on *Saturday Night Live*), "Since all that ever matters is the music, then regarding everything I've said—*never mind.*"

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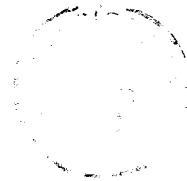
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# BAAC PAGE

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[www.BAACcordionclub.org](http://www.BAACcordionclub.org)



BILLY MITCHELL



USA  
55

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE



# Calendar of Events



The November BAAC meeting will be on the 8th which is the second Wednesday of the month. The meeting will feature a special performance by Stas Venglevski & Mike Alongi.

## October

- 2 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
- 4 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7 pm**  
Patio Espanol, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco  
Info: 510.792.8765  
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>
- 10 Golden State Accordion Club, 7:00pm  
Pietro's #2. 679 Merchant. Vacaville  
Info: 707.864.2359
- 11 Good Time Accordion Club General Meeting,  
7:00pm Escalon Community Center  
1055 Escalon Ave. Escalon, CA  
Info: 209.545.3603
- 12 East Bay Accordion Circle, 7:30pm  
1542 Grant St. Berkeley In the cottage behind  
the main house. Bring Your Accordion!  
Info: 510.548.2822
- 14 Savoy Doucet Band  
Ashkenaz. Berkeley, CA.  
Times & Admission: TBA
- 15 Savoy Doucet Band  
Freight & Savage  
Berkeley, CA  
Times & Admission: TBA
- 15 Beginning Button Box Accordion, 2-4pm  
w/ Miguel Govea. Pre-Register: \$35.00  
Boaz Accordions  
Sacramento St. at 67. Berkeley, CA  
Info: 510.845.1429

- 16 ACR General Meeting, 7:30pm  
Herman Sons Hall.  
860 Western. Petaluma  
Info. contact Harry Cannata at: 707.838.2859
- 19 Accordion Salon, 7:30pm  
w/ Carol Denny. (English Concertina)  
Boaz Accordions  
Sacramento St. at 67. Berkeley, CA  
Info: 510.845.1429 Fee: \$4.00

## November

- 5 Composition & Transposition. 2-4pm  
w/ Lou Jacklich. Pre-Register: \$35.00  
Boaz Accordions  
Sacramento St. at 67. Berkeley, CA  
Info: 510.845.1429
- 8 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7 pm**  
**Stas Venglevski & Mike Alongi to perform**  
Patio Espanol, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco  
Info: 510.792.8765  
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>  
**November's meeting will be on the second  
Wednesday of the month.**
- 12 Composition & Transposition. 2-4pm  
w/ Lou Jacklich. Pre-Register: \$35.00  
Boaz Accordions  
Sacramento St. at 67. Berkeley, CA  
Info: 510.845.1429

## December

- 2 ACR Christmas Dinner Dance  
Herman Sons Hall. 860 Western. Petaluma  
More info to come
- 6 **Bay Area Accordion Club Meeting, 7 pm**  
Patio Espanol, 2850 Alemany Blvd. San Francisco  
Info: 510.792.8765  
<http://www.baaccordionclub.org>
- 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

## 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.