



Entertainment tonight: an account of bands in Manitowoc County since 1900. Monograph 28 1976

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Manitowoc, Wisconsin: Manitowoc County Historical Society, 1976

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MANITOWOC COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OCCUPATIONAL
MONOGRAPH 28
1976 Series

EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer of this monograph is a student in Journalism at the University of Arizona. The manuscript was written to satisfy a graduate school course requirement.

TERRACE GARDENS
TONIGHT

FREE OLD-TIME DANCE

Music by

PAUL GOSZ
Orchestra

Everyone Welcome

D - A - N - C - E
Peterson's Modernistic
Ballroom

VALDERS

Sunday, November 11

BOB MLADA'S
Orchestra

Last Dance Before Advent

GRAND BALL
Forst's New Hall - Tisch Mills, Wis.
Thursday, November 22

CY URBANEK'S PLAYERS

Advance orders taken for chicken dinner
\$1 Per Plate

A real good time assured
W. R. FORST

Entertainment Tonight

An Account of Bands in Manitowoc County Since 1900

by ROBERT JANDA

Big Poultry Picnic & Dance

Saturday, Oct. 10

Music by

NASS-STUIBER ORCHESTRA

Sunday, Oct. 11
Big Poultry Picnic
At Silver Lake Hotel

MARTIN OUKER

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT

It didn't quite attain the depth of a Bach concerto or exhibit the poetry of Dylan's lyrics. Nureyev has no doubt mastered more demanding steps, while the Beatles have been known to captivate slightly larger audiences.

Since the early 1900's when it began to take shape, until now when it has matured but not wilted, it has successfully quenched a thirst for music in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. When combined with a dance step or an occasional nip of beer, its old-time rhythms have made arthritis disappear. Old-time music (also referred to as polka music) created plenty of excitement here and that is one big reason why Manitowoc has been called the pride of the polka belt.

AUTUMN DANCE
Sun. Sept. 5
ROMY'S
BALLROOM
Polivka's Corners
Music by

ROMY GOSZ
ORCH.

ADMISSION ONLY 50 cents

DANCE
at the
MARIBEL BALLROOM
SUNDAY, Nov. 23
Music by

DUKE JANDA
and his
ORCHESTRA

Entertainment Tonight will examine the history of old-time music in Manitowoc by first journeying back to 1900. The objectives are not only to take a nostalgic look at the past and refresh memories, but also to reveal some historical facts about local music that have not been exposed.

Getting Its Feet Wet

It is very difficult to pin down an exact date when old-time music premiered in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Since nothing to date has been written on this subject, it's even more nebulous to attempt awarding a single person credit. A logical course to follow, then, was to hunt down the elder musicians and compile their knowledge. Oh yes, a few local musicians pushing ninety years young still live here. Long chats with these seasoned veterans revealed some answers to the local polka evolution dilemma. Answers in fact singled out a neighboring band that developed and inspired a polka trend some seventy years ago.

This dapper crew of musicians hailed from Pilsen, Wisconsin, about twenty five miles north of Manitowoc, and appropriately labeled themselves The Pilsen Brass Band. No doubt there were other bands of this type around the state and nation. Surely the Polish hillbillies from Springfield, Massachusetts, wouldn't attribute their polka heritage to Pilsen, Wisconsin.

Six young men, including five farmers and a painter organized The Pilsen Brass Band for a truckload of fun more than any other reason. How were they able to put together the infamous ooom-pah sound?



Pilsen Brass Band. Left to right: Frank Schleis, George Sladky, Mike Nejedlo, Jim Janda, Mike Suess, Joe Altman.



Original sheet music from Pilsen Brass Band Book

Share the Wealth

Some of their parents came to the United States from what is now called the old country. Voyages from Bohemia and Czechoslovakia brought along customs that were rekindled in this new land. Thus ancestors of The Pilsen Brass Band passed along their traditional musical memories. Written music if any, was left behind.

Pilsen Band personnel were given musical instruments at a very young age. Experimentation with these music makers coupled with parents and friends recollections of old country music, reproduced a musical style that became a mainstay in Manitowoc.

While individual skills progressed, so did the band as a unit. Complete numbers were arranged but mostly "kept in the head" as musicians used to say. Years of service together produced many many numbers which were eventually put into written form, and wisely so for history's sake. When finally coordinated, the band could play all evening without repeating

numbers. Depending on what the crowd had in mind, all night meant all night whether it was four or eight hours of work. Weddings supplied most of the work, and for \$9 a job, their services were reasonably priced.

Why did the group call themselves a brass band? Brass bands as opposed to a standard polka band today didn't use pianos, saxophones or percussion. A look at the band's personnel and what they played should clarify its structure.

A Brass Band's Structure

Joe Altman was the official leader and played trumpet. Sliver suckers, or reed instrument men included Wencil "Jim" Janda on E flat clarinet (which appears to be a toy because of its size), and George Sladky on second clarinet. Mike Suess played alto horn, an upright brass instrument with a small bell. He was responsible for the many "tahs" as in "boom-tah" which satisfied the rhythm. Frank Schleis took care of the "booms" as he caressed the somewhat larger E flat bass horn. Last in the six man unit was Mike Nejedlo, another horn player with another duty. He simply helped fill the gap between "boom" and "tah."

The Pilsen Band won the hearts of many listeners back in 1910 when it began. They'd play as many as sixty dates in a row before realizing a night off. Because those were days of horse and buggy, miles seemed to take an eternity to complete compared to today. If snow accumulation was exceptionally heavy in winter, sleighs were used as alternate transportation for the band. Some jobs took twenty hours to complete, so in that case, wages averaged out to an incredible seven cents an hour for each man.

Imaginative Music

Through the years, the wily pioneers of old-time arranged a rather diversified portfolio of numbers. Dancers could verify this as the music really kept them busy because each number had a certain

danceable style. Here is a quick summary of what the band offered:

GALOP — Galops sounded similar to marches but were arranged in danceable fashion. "Hurry Up Galop" was a band composition.

REEL — Couples danced with their arms hooked together. Music started and stopped throughout as couples clapped hands and stamped feet at appropriate times.

LANDLER — A waltz is equivalent to a landler. In the Pilsen Band music book, landlers were referred to by numbers such as Landler 10, more so than by name. Some had titles like "Easy Waltz" or "Bela Waltz."

TWO-STEP — A two-step was really a slow polka. Dancers moved diagonally across the floor rather than in a group circle.

SCHOTTISCHE — Schottisches drew the popularity prize. Couples would hook arms, then take three steps and kick. This sequence was done over and over during a schottische.

Even though the numbers within each category (galop, reel, landler, etc.) of music sounded similar, tunes varied just enough to hold interest. Most people liked the music. The Bohemians, Polish, Belgians and Germans loved it. As a result of the Pilsen Band's popularity and style, many other local bands soon formed. This assured Manitowoc a rich old-time tradition for years to come.

Entertainment Tonight will now refresh your memory of some popular

bands during the 1910's, 20's and 30's. Unlike a brass band, they used pianos and drums among other interesting instruments.

Success Breeds Success

The Dan Zahorik Band, Gloe-Naidl Orchestra, Lyric Orchestra and Cy Urbanek's Players made quite a contribution to the business. Each group lasted about thirteen years. Dan Zahorik said, "You'd have a band as long as it would last. People would leave to do other things at any time. You couldn't pick up fill-ins like today because talent was scarce."

Dan's music education began with an accordion. In fact, Mike Yindra, a local contractor in those days who also formed a band bought Dan his first squeeze box. Dan knew absolutely nothing about technique so Mike suggested to Dan that he "is just going to have to learn how." "Music just came to me," Dan said. "The Pilsen Band started things going in this area. I remember I'd listen to them play at the old Opera House and boy that outfit sounded better than our big band."

Cy Urbanek's early music career had a little more direction than Dan's. Cy was fortunate to have played with an army band for initial training, so after leaving the service he bought a saxophone "more for amusement than anything." Cy said, "I'd take that sax and go down by the old furniture store on Eighth Street and lock myself in the back room to practice." A short time later, Cy attended a dance in Denmark, Wisconsin, to hear the Den-

mark Orchestra play. He was asked to sit in, and after playing a few numbers a band member questioned Cy as to why he didn't have his own band. That was all the incentive Cy needed.

The Talented Lyric

Many musicians were looking for work, but that didn't mean the number of talented musicians was plentiful. Norman Berkedal, leader of Lyric and an off-shoot band called Berkey's Bluebirds acquired many talented people to play his music. Brothers Regis and Art Brault played with Lyric and later formed their own group called Brault's Canadiens. Brault's Canadiens was a very popular band but didn't stay around this area much. They would journey to the southern states and perform there for months at a time.

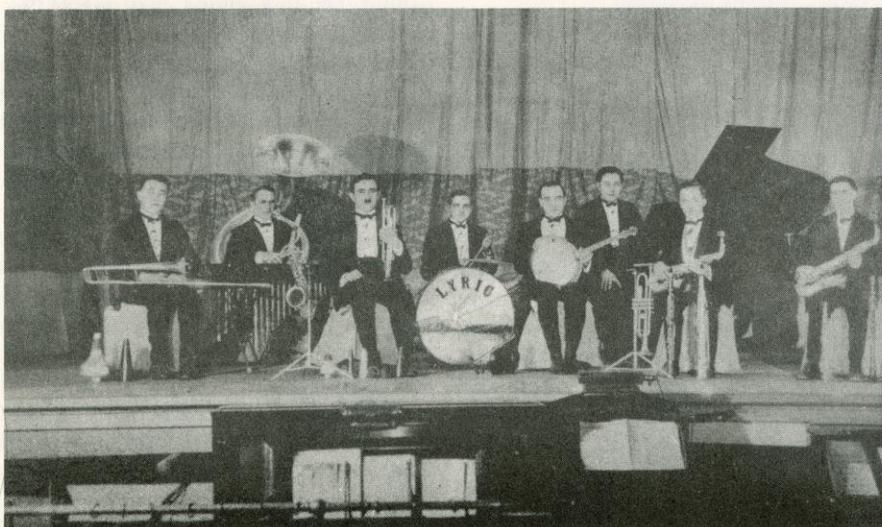
Trombonist Sonny Sievert enjoyed some fruitful years with Lyric and later joined the famous Dick Ruedebusch band out of Milwaukee. Walter Ahrens, a well known musician in Manitowoc also put in many years with Lyric. Music buffs might remember Eddy Shampoh. Many say he was the finest drummer this area ever had. Eddy left the nationally famous Al Sweet Band and joined Lyric in its later years.

Surely the Gloe-Naidl Orchestra brings back fond memories. Lyric played many doubles with this band. Doubles, or two bands working the same job, were popular. Each band would alternate sets or numbers depending on whether the facility had one or two stages. Wally Ahrens recalled how, "Randy Gloe sure could slap tongue and make his sax laugh." Randy played sax with the Ringling Brothers Circus at one time.

Similar to the Pilsen Band legend, these bands used music sparingly. A few taps from the leader's foot and away they went. Many musicians couldn't read a note anyway. Don Schleis had another well known local band then, and was great for setting up the music stands and never putting anything on them.

During the 1920's and early 30's, wages shot up conservatively to \$4 per man. The policy was to get what wages you could and play until the place cleared out. Although a musicians' union was active, some joined and some didn't. Cy Urbanek, for instance, brought his band in the union as a group without being subjected to any entrance exam. The initial fee was \$5 and dues were \$2 per year.

Not everyone managed so easily, however. Wally Ahrens had to perform in front of a three-man examining board for union consideration. He remembered



Lyric Orchestra. Left to right: Bob Schultz, Ben Wolf, Fred Brault, Regis Brault, Art Brault, Ben Bartleme, Norman Berkedal, Walter Ahrens.

playing "Me and My Girlfriend" plus other assorted reading tests. If you failed the exam, a mandatory six month waiting period took effect before a second attempt was granted. An average exam consisted of playing a scale or "Home Sweet Home."

Drawing Cards

Wages may have been a bit thin but jobs were abundant. The Opera House catered to a wide range of events and saw a barrage of bands perform on stage. Pilsen's Brass Band used to play out front on a balmy Sunday afternoon in summer singing Bohemian songs and filling the air with old-time music. A dance job inside the Opera House was no easy task, though. Because of the building's immense size, the walls and floor absorbed much of the music. Remember, there were no amplifiers then, and each man had to let loose so all could hear. Friday night dances at the Opera House after basketball games were very common.

Martin Ouker's Silver Lake Lodge provided years of dancing enjoyment. Martin came to Manitowoc off the merchant boats in quest of an alternate profession. He fulfilled this ambition by organizing one of the largest and most successful dance halls in Manitowoc County. Martin was a good-hearted man but realized success by exhibiting his shrewd business ability. Dan Zahorik said, "Martin would want the band to keep playing even if there was no crowd. We couldn't take many bathroom or bar breaks either. Keep playing if you wanted your money." Silver Lake Lodge is long gone, but its memory lingers on.

Other popular spots in Manitowoc were Blue Ribbon Hall, Becker's Beer Garden, Saenger Hall and Zboralski's Hall run by pay-day Joe. One musician who worked there said, "If you were a good polka player, you were a celebrity at pay-day Joe's."

Does nickel dancing ring a bell? It created some kind of excitement and really tested a band's stamina.

A railing was placed around the dance floor with five or six openings used as entrances. Couples had to purchase a nickel ticket each time they danced. The band would allow a crowd about three minutes of music, then two minutes to clear the floor. As soon as it emptied, another number began. Such hustle and bustle was tough on a band because it meant playing twelve to fourteen numbers an hour. A band experienced at this sort of thing could play a few more numbers than perhaps a rookie band.



Nass-Stuiber Band during St. Nazianz picnic at Seminary Farm (1932) Left to right: Ken Niquette, Albert Klein, Clarence Waack, Joe Stuiber, Walter Vetter, Edmund Nass, John Vetter.

Why was this important? If, for instance, there were one hundred couples at \$5 per dance, two additional numbers meant \$10 more for management each hour or up to \$50 more per night. Although the band didn't share in this profit strategy, their proficiency helped book additional jobs.

Other interesting jobs were poultry balls. Management raffled off chickens and ducks while a band played for three hours in the afternoon. An evening dance wrapped up a full day of festivities.

Admission to most dances ranged from thirty-five cents to fifty cents. Nickel dancing did well as did nickel beer. Whiskey sold for ten cents, or fifteen cents for the quality stuff which probably had aged for two weeks instead of one. Complimentary meals for the band were quite traditional as they would usually be served a big chicken dinner during intermission. Some places also offered the crowd a big piece of sausage or cheese on a bun for only five pennies.

Jobs lured bands all over Manitowoc County. Maribel, Kellnersville, Kewaunee, Bolt, Branch, Centerville, Rief's Mills, Tisch Mills, Melnick, Larabee and other towns all had at least one dance hall. Many had two or three.

Getting There and Getting Known

It seemed like just about everyone had an automobile back then that was worthy of a story or two today. Musicians were no exception. A Ford Roadster Model T with crank engine sold for \$150 and served the purpose, but a seven passenger case band wagon had class. When Eddy Nass, co-manager of the Nass-Stuiber Orchestra (another Manitowoc band to be mentioned in greater detail later on) was asked if his band did any vocals he said, "No vocals, except coming home in the band wagon." Even though Dan Zahorik

was proud of his Studebaker with right side drive, he never forgot Tony Dutz's old touring car with a brass engine. Tony used to run Shiminek's Bar in Manitowoc. Cy Urbanek enjoyed his Packard and had a special rack added on the back for drums. "Cy Urbanek's Players" decorated the side panels.

Band names were for the most part pretty basic compared to rock groups today. Cy's band played one job as the Happy Six — an appealing name indeed. But anyone who wanted to hire the band didn't know who to contact. Cy discovered a musicians magazine that listed all active orchestras in the United States. One listing included Cy Malberg's Players. How about Cy Urbanek's Players? It sounded fine to Cy and at least people would know who to contact for a dance job.

Let the Good Times Roll

When gasoline sold for five cents a gallon and pork chops cost twelve cents each, Eddy Nass and Joe Stuiber combined talents to form another seven piece orchestra. Ed said, "I was boss on stage but Joe did all the booking because he had a telephone." Not everyone had a phone then because it took some getting used to.

Barn dances accounted for some of Nass-Stuiber's work in the 1930's because music and beer were a must when a new barn was finished. One major problem with barn parties from a music standpoint was the absence of a piano. It was impossible to cart one along, thus any kind of a substitution was appreciated. Walter Todl, a local citizen supplied the missing link for such jobs because he had a unique talent. Walter played harp. Aside from performing at barn dances, Walter was known for going from tavern to tavern with a harp strapped to his back.



Tiny Laude's Orchestra. Left to right: Royce Birr, George "Bud" Woida, Al Meyer, Walter Ahrens, Tiny Laude, Roland Neilitz, Jake Nehampkin, Reiny Zunker, Ray Johnson.

entertaining the clientele for fun and pleasure.

It's apparent that many pioneer musicians in Manitowoc mastered an instrument, and old-time music in general without much training. George Denk, well known in the local music circle and long time member of the Nass-Stuiber band exemplified this point.

George was in a grocery store one Wednesday morning when a friend asked him if he knew how to play an accordion. George had piano experience but never attempted the squeeze box. The gentleman needed an accordion player and drummer for the next Saturday evening, so old George agreed to take the job and admitted he wasn't afraid of the treble side, just the pushing and pulling. "I knew the drummer could hold rhythm in case I forgot to pull and push. Boy, I made the grade Saturday and have played accordion ever since without taking a lesson."

The Nass-Stuiber Band had many good times with exciting jobs and interesting personnel. Ed Nass believed his band was the first to broadcast live from local radio station WOMT. He said, "I remember because we were so scared. We didn't know what was going to happen or what to expect. After opening, we played there one night a week live for the next couple of years."

On the Road with Tiny

Old-time music during the 1910's, '20's, and '30's had a basic sound that

Tiny Laude was his name and adventure his game. Laude ran a contemporary band in that it digressed from old-time and played modern music instead. Tiny hired a booker who (to put it mildly) contracted jobs on the road. Jobs reached into North and South Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan and all over Wisconsin. Once in a while the boys would return to Manitowoc during a break in the action and entertain locally until the booker pieced together another lengthy road trip.

Wally Ahrens had the opportunity to play for Laude's orchestra and recalled how the machine kept rolling. He said, "The booker used to make us jump five hundred miles a night just to keep the band working. We played some beautiful jobs along the way. Some were not so memorable. The booker had a knack for booking us in summer places in winter and winter places in summer."

Sheet music was quite important to Tiny's orchestra, thus he purchased arrangements from music outlets in New York and San Francisco. Popular fox trots were "Whispering," "Yearning" and "Did You Ever Think Of Me." At its peak, Tiny's band utilized nine men including a trombonist and guitarist which added depth and diversity necessary in modern music arrangements. Many people didn't own radios then, so popular numbers were played four and



Paul Gosz and Sons Family Orchestra and Basketball Team (1926). Left to right: Romy, George, Paul, Mike, Frank.

five times a night to satisfy requests.

Tiny's band operated under a strict business proposition. Each member was hired by the week, not by the job, and averaged about \$60 per week in earnings. Four expenses had to come out of each job's gross take. First the booker received his cut. Then there were room expenses, poster fees and gas expenses. Wages came out of what remained, and part of this money had to buy meals. It may sound like poverty, but during the depression it made cents.

When Tiny retired from the business, his trumpet man took over and formed a five piece band. Later on, Wally Ahrens picked up the band and called it Wally Ahrens and the Lyric Orchestra. They mostly played in and around Manitowoc because jobs were plentiful. Although modern music wasn't as well received as old-time, its impact was favorable and was to be much more prevalent in years to come.

The Pilsen Brass Band, Dan Zahorik and his Orchestra, Nass-Stuiber, Lyric, Gloe-Naidl and his Orchestra, Cy Urbanek's Players, Tiny Laude's and others fueled a musical heritage in Manitowoc. One unmentioned musician became a legend — compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Gosz.

A Legend

Seven years after he was born, Roman Louis Gosz took his first piano lesson from Mrs. Charlie Kirchen, Sr., a Manitowoc music teacher. On the very next Saturday, Romy called her and said he

couldn't make the next lesson because of a dance job. She told Romy not to come back at all "because if you can play a job with one lesson . . ." He never took another lesson.

At age eleven, Romy joined his father Paul and brothers George and Mike to form a family orchestra. Talents went beyond music, though. Along with brother Frank, the Gosz band formed a hometown basketball team in Rockwood, Wisconsin, a village just north of Manitowoc. They'd compete against teams in the village hall and play for a dance there after the tilt.

The family orchestra lasted from 1921 to 1924. George took over the band then because Paul had started another group called Pauly's Playboys. George's stint as leader lasted almost four years before he bought a tavern business and had to call it quits. Romy took over in 1928 and worked his first job as leader on July 10 of that year.

A minor complication for Romy in 1931 can now be judged a major turning point in his career. Romy needed a trumpet man for a job but didn't know where to get one. He knew where to find a piano player however and hired him, even though piano is what Romy had played. The story is simple — he changed to trumpet. "I taught myself," he said.

The Romy Gosz Orchestra traveled to Grafton, Wisconsin, that year to make a record. The band successfully cut one side and named it "The Pilsen Polka." Things worked out so well that between 1933 and 1938 the boys cut seventy-four

sides under the Decca, Oken, Brunswick and Columbia labels. Titles such as "Barnswallow Polka," "Broke But Happy Polka" and "Picnic in the Woods" are collectors items today.

More recordings were made for the Mercury label in 1945. Each man received \$50 for three hours work at Mercury, which wasn't bad cash. Mercury also profited, as it once received over eleven thousand orders for a Romy Gosz recording before it was marketed. More meaningful to Romy, though, were the letters he'd get from servicemen all over the world asking for his recordings.

Manitowoc County had about twenty dance halls then so it was not uncommon for the band to play fifty consecutive nights. Memorable jobs included a huge dance hall near Green Bay called Bluestone Park. Bluestone wedding dances brought in sixteen hundred people a night sometimes. More than one thousand people jammed into a dance hall in Theresa, Wisconsin, once to hear Romy's band. Theresa's population then was about four hundred.

Sundays were always hectic. The boys would get home early Sunday morning from a Saturday night dance job and have to get up to do a noon shot at the local radio station. Bluestone Park was next in line that afternoon, then they'd head out for a Sunday night job. Extended trips for the Romy Gosz Orchestra included two weeks in Texas, a short time in Hollywood to check out an appealing movie contract, and a few days in New York for a recording session.

Romy boldly admitted he was "internationally famous as the polka king." The man became a legend but it never changed him as a person. Romy looked to religion, and preferred to talk about an event in his career that overshadowed the popularity image, the recording contracts or the big city excursions.

His band played for a diamond jubilee celebration at St. Mary's Catholic church in Tisch Mills, Wisconsin. Father Rudolph James Hodak appreciated what the band did for his church. When Father Hodak went to Rome the following year for a conference with Pope Pius XII, he gave the pontiff some of Romy's recordings and brought back a papal blessing for Romy and the band. A framed certificate to that effect was Romy's proudest possession.

The Romy Gosz story has appeared in Time, Pic and Coronet magazines. Numerous newspapers covered his life story also. Something was missed in each of these accounts. There is more to Romy Gosz than all the glamour accorded him.



Romy Gosz Band buying a brand new 1936 band wagon from Lauson Chevrolet in Manitowoc. Left to right: Car Salesman, Romy Gosz, Fritz Pultz, Linky Kolbeck, Andy Heier, Rudy Plocar, Don Kruswick, Gordy Kolbeck, Car Salesman.

His start in music was no different from that of other musicians who received their musical baptism in this area. The tunes he played took on no significant change from the days of Pilsen's Brass Band. Romy projected a down to earth image — not one of an egotistic celebrity. Then why the popularity? What made this man click? Men who worked with Romy for many years offered their insight.

Dan Zahorik was a veteran with Romy's band. "There were no frills with Romy," he said. "This man was a straightforward person with a personality to match. He played with feeling and had a way of working up a crowd. People would be going at midnight like it was New Year's Eve." Max Terens, a long time bass horn player with Romy reminisced about some of the jobs. "When a hall played rough or the public address system broke down, Romy would tell us to blow a little harder fellas, that's good enough. He'd sit back in his chair a little and she'd really come out of there. He had all the power in the world. It scared you sometimes. Romy never had a sore lip and nothing ever bothered him. He'd say, c'mon boys and away we went for five encores."

Style is what made Romy Gosz click. He treated everyone well. All the boys in his band were quite close. Romy had plenty of style off stage too. He once bought an old hearse and used it to cart the band around. It was complete with red flashing lights and a siren. Many times on the way home from a job, he'd put these accessories to good use. One band member recalled going through Maribel, Wisconsin, during early morning hours with the siren screaming and red lights flashing like crazy. Romy would quickly hide the buggy behind a tavern, duck inside, and watch everybody through a window running back and forth wondering what the heck was happening. Now that is style!

Dancer to Modern Band — "Do You Know Any Polkas?"

Manitowoc County always had a thirst for old-time music. The future looks no different. Tiny Laude and his predecessor Wally Ahrens introduced a modern band to this area and it fared well. Modern music had its place, and the event or type of crowd usually dictated the kind of music played. Thus modern bands had to be versatile and be able to analyze crowds accordingly. Modern music was appreciated around the local club circuit, proms and charity balls etc. Weddings were a different story because polka music



Duke Janda Orchestra. Left to right, back row: Chuck Schwake, Ed McNickols, Fred Greenwald, Ben Zboralski, J. Snortum. Left to right, front row: Les Keirken, Jerry Rawley, Duke Janda, Shorty Martin, Band Vocalist, Carol Haase.

accounted for at least sixty per cent of the numbers played.

Modern bands patterned their music after the style of Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Lawrence Welk. To achieve this sound, bands had to work with ten and eleven men. Arrangements called for four reeds, three brass and three rhythms. Female singers sometimes joined a band to add a pleasant change of pace. Two local modern bands during the 1940's, '50's and '60's that had much success were Bob Mlada's Orchestra and Duke Janda's Orchestra.

Bob remembered playing vaudeville shows at the Capitol theatre in Manitowoc from 1948 to 1950. "The shows ran Wednesday afternoons and evenings," he said. "The same for Thursday. They'd come through about every month. The shows helped our band musically because a lot of things happened quick. You always went along with the performers or you were outstanding in being wrong. Wally Vern and Mary Beth Hughes performed here. The boy that played banjo on the old Zorro shows came here too."

Bob's band also did some jobs with the Crew-Cuts and Rusty Draper. An evening with Nat King Cole as a back-up band will never be forgotten. One year the band received a plaque commemorating them as one of the outstanding bands in the midwest.

Duke Janda's Orchestra played some memorable occasions as well. His finest moment in the business came without an audience. "Lawrence Welk needed a girl singer," Duke recalled. "We made a record at WOMT with an excellent singer and submitted the cut to Welk for consideration. She won the position and she was only seventeen years old. The bad part was that her mother would not

consent to her leaving home. She was offered \$75 a week from Welk but had to turn it down."

Duke was fortunate to acquire some highly talented musicians for his band during the years. Vic Bohacek, well known locally in the music field played with a Glen Miller unit in Australia and with the famous Ted Weams band around Chicago and New York. Eddy McNickels, a draftsman from Two Rivers, Wisconsin, came from the Joe Guman Band that was famous from records and television engagements. Alan Bonde, a farm boy from Bonde's corners near Manitowoc is now teaching music at Boston College. Fritz Greenwald began his music career with Duke and has since become a music professor in Springfield, Illinois.

The Mlada and Janda orchestras magnify the fact that local music took on significant changes since the Pilsen Band played their first number together. These bands should be remembered for adding diversity to the local music culture, and for enhancing music appreciation in general. Even though they often had to cater to an old-time audience, their qualities differ appreciably when compared to polka bands. Their style and level of music allowed for a broader expression of musical talent. They were more than polka bands turned radical.

Others

Entertainment Tonight has brought you through some seventy years of music. It is impossible to mention every band and every musician that contributed, even though all are equally responsible for this story. But for the sake of soothing a somewhat guilty conscience, the next paragraph is in order.

Art Braunel enjoyed much success

with his big band polka sound during the 1930's. Genial Gene Heier and his Orchestra contributed a chapter to music history here. He still brings his music into thousands of homes on Sunday mornings via television. Rollie Neilitz has a polka band that's as popular as any. A variety of trios and quartets entered the field. Don Pribek and Speed Hooper in particular popularized the small group trend because many entertainment facilities could not handle a large band.

For What It's Worth

Music seemed to undergo a human change as opposed to a style change in the 1940's. Musicians now are no longer in the business for fun and love of music. Tax, wage, personnel and travel headaches have replaced some of the pleasure and a few bands have folded because of it. Today the business is highly organized and competitive. Opportunities to cut records and receive television exposure have broadened, while poultry picnics and nickel dancing have faded away. Musicians now learn music in high school bands rather than teach themselves. Economic pressures forced many of the old dance halls out of business. Modern facilities and prices have replaced that kind of atmosphere.

The pioneer musicians are aware of the changes and accept them because the polka tradition continues to go strong. Even though accepted, they are not convinced it is as much fun as it used to be. They miss the music and nostalgia, but mostly miss the people in the business — it's a proud family.

The future looks to more talent within a continuing tradition. Perhaps a local band will some day work hard enough to become as well known as the Lawrence Welk band which also started in a small town. Many people and many events molded a solid musical heritage. One man, more than anyone else, deserves recognition for what has happened here in music. Many try to match his style but it can't be done. He's one of kind. Some say he was the best musician they ever heard. A music professor might grade him as the most unpleasant.

Some James Taylor lyrics from a cut entitled "Music" might best describe what music is all about here and what this man believed in.

*"Well things may always stay
the way they are
Still my head looks for a change
from time to time
I don't really mean to look that far,
Turn on the music
Strike up the music
Let the music change my mind"*



Romy Gosz — The King

Finis

"When he lived the dance floor was filled with happy people. When he died — standing room only. The church was full."

A Romy Gosz Fan

MANITOWOC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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