

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDION PROJECT

Tape Notes

INTERVIEW WITH: Tony Poderzay
Box 273
Soudan, MN 55782
218/753-3970

Tapes: Reels SBB 14,15,16
Cassette CSBB 10,11
Slides: Sheet 3; 1-13

AT: Poderzay Home, Soudan

DATE: Friday, May 18, 1984

Tony was born and raised in Soudan, lived there all his life, attended local schools, graduated from Tower High School. He spent a year in CCC, went to work for U.S. Steel July 10, 1941. He worked in Soudan underground mine until it closed in 1962, transferred to Pioneer mine, Ely, and worked there for five years. After Pioneer mine closed, he worked at the Minntac plant at Mt. Iron.

He talks about underground mining, promotion steps from chute man to working in stopes mining the ore, running machinery, blasting, drilling.

Pioneer was the last underground mine in Minnesota. Minntac is open pit. He started there on track gang. Pete Delgreco, General Foreman for drilling and blasting, got Tony transferred to his crew, where he stayed until he retired.

He talks about working at Minntac, drillers, patterns and sizes of holes for explosive charges. Tony, as blaster, would fill holes with powder according to engineering specifications. Blasters measured powder, filled hole, covered with stemming (dirt). Two primers or boosters were placed in the powder charge with cords running to the surface, holes were wired together, connected in patterns, detonated. Blasting pattern begun with initiation or cap hole where electirc caps were placed. He retired April, 1983.

Tony is married, has two daughters, one in St. Paul, one in Soudan.

How Tony got started playing the button accordion.

TP: "The thing is, as a youngster at home, my Dad always had a button accordion. My Dad used to play. I must have been about seven or eight years old and kinda watched a little bit what he used to do, you know. So whenever I figured he'd be going for a little longer period of time, and he was gone out of the house, I'd go in the bedroom and take the accordion and go play, go, go, go, hide under the library table. The old style had this board underneath, down below, and go sit under there and push and pull that thing."

JB: "And how old were you when you were doing this?"

TP: "Like I say, maybe seven or eight years old."

Tony Poderzay

Page - 2 -

JB: "What would your Dad have said?"

TP: "Well, he didn't know anything about it for awhile, until one day I figured he was gone and he backtracked and caught me. So he says well if you want to play, he says, you better come out and sit on a chair, he says. So then every once in awhile I got to playing around with the thing."

Tony's father came from Yugoslavia in 1913 at age 19, from a small town near Ljubljana. His mother was born in Soudan, her parents were from Yugoslavia. His father first went to Ely, had a sister there.

Tony learned to play by watching his father, but figured it out by himself. He quit playing the button accordion and took up piano accordion after he got out of CCC. He bought his first piano accordion after he got out of the service and went back to work in the mine.

He formed a band with brother Tom and Dave Spragg, guitar player from Eveleth. Did weddings, bar jobs. Played C & W, polkas, waltzes, "But no rock and roll", didn't have instrumentation.

At eight years ^{ago} ~~old~~ his interest in button box began to increase on the Range. He looked for an accordion. Tony plays Slovenian fingering style. "Hard to come by."

Talks about Mervar being killed in auto accident, how he found an instrument through Frankie Kramer. He bought a 1923 Mervar three row from Frank Mesnick, Gheen, and had John Bolster, Minnetonka, repair and restore it. Tony's brother, Len, was in contact with builder, Bill Mehle, Willoughly, Ohio. Len had German style. Tony wanted Slovenian style fingering. It took Mehle two years to build him one.

Talks about Mehle, difficulty assembling Slovenian fingering.

Tony has two button accordions. Mervar keys C-F-B^b, Mehle keys F-B^b-E^b-A^b.

Tony's family was musical. Mother played pump organ, later a piano. There are eight children, all play except older sister, who knew the words. Joe plays German fingered button box. Dad also played German fingering. Tony chose Slovenian fingering because of a neighbor in Soudan who had one and let him try it. He liked the flat keyboard and the four rows.

End reel 1

Tony Poderzay
Page - 3 -

Tony plays with brother Tom, piano accordion, and Len on button. Also with Joe, and two sisters on piano accordion. Plays nursing home or polka jam sessions. Usually with Tom and Len.

JB: "What has music meant?"

TP: "I really enjoy it." "Good pastime."

Talks about playing, doesn't consider himself a professional.

Other influences: Mentions radio programs, Frankie Smoltz, Herman Mesjetrick.

He used to play with Jim Karish, Mesaba Button Box Club.

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDION PROJECT

Tony Poderzay

Tape Notes
5/18/84
jwb

CSBB 10 B

Tony plays a 1923 3-row Mervar, C-F-B^b, with Slovenian or flat fingerboard.

"Penguin Polka"

"Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain"

JB asks if he plays any of the songs his father used to play. Tony says no, father had a different style, would play songs for singing like this one.

✓ "Over Three Hills" waltz

✓ "Kamnicks Polka"

Tony switches to his Mehle accordion, 4-row, F-B^b-E^b-A^b, flat fingerboard talks about when he uses each instrument.

TP says he likes to try different kinds of songs, i.e.

✓ "La Cucaracha"

his wife is Finnish so he has to "keep peace in the family."

"Life in the Finnish Woods" waltz

there are two versions or two melodies titled "Moja Dekla" one is a bit faster than the other.

✓ "Moja Dekla"

Tony says he hasn't played the other one for a long time, so doesn't. Talks about hearing songs from other players, like the next one.

✓ "Čakala Bom" sp? "I'll Wait for You" waltz

* "Poderzay Waltz" Tony's wife Eileen urged him to pay this one.

end CSBB 10 side B

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDION PROJECT

Tony Poderzay

CSBB 11 A

Tape Notes

5/18/84

jwb

* "

waltz

"Samoj Nemoj Ti"

waltz

"Glas Harmonika"

waltz

"Rifleman"

polka

"In Spain They Say Si Si"

radio/with fade under narration. Tony talks about adapting this song to a polka style and what he has done to the song to change it. Watch for oops after the first time around, about 1 minute.

* "THE WANDERER"

polka

end cassette side 11 A

CSBB