

TAPE INDEX

Jim Leary
May 1, 1985

Harbor Lights
Milwaukee, WI

[The first six numbers are tunes played by the band: Gerhardt Schweinert, accordion, vocals; Julie Leszczynski, vocals; Ken Schuetzler, drums; Dennis Tomaschek, saxophone; John Birich, bass; Tim _____, guitar.]

1. Ein Bischen Frieden [recorder comes on in the midst of the song and microphones and levels are adjusted].

2. Ein Bischen Frieden, repeated [the recording is as good as possible given unfavorable conditions described in the field notes].

3. Heut Kommt Mein Hertz Zu Dir.

4. Unknown tune.

5. Schonne Maid.

6. Caramba Caraco Ein Whiskey: a medley incorporating six folk tunes.

[John Birich begins to talk.]

7. Mother came over from East Prussia in 1952 with a little Hohner piano accordion. J, b. 1962, started accordion at five, studied seriously until 18. Lessons from Beihoff (sp?) Music, Ochs Music.

8. J fascinated by his mother's making the left hand buttons work.

9. At age six had first recital. Played at nursing home with brother while wearing lederhosen. They still play there over Christmas.

11. J wears lederhosen throughout summer.

11. He and brother played together when growing up, but started playing with a German group, "Talisman," at 15 or 16--cross between German-American and Country music. Then his brother, Bob, played accordion and guitar with Harbor Lights for awhile. B had left to play with Spitzbuben for a few years; that band put

out an LP.

12. For a year and a half J and B and drummer from Spitzbuben and a keyboard player formed Tyroler Boys. All in early twenties. Love German music, but are versatile for mixed crowds.

13. Played "Jungle Love" and "Billie Jean" along with polkas and waltzes for a recent high school dance.

14. J likes the beauty and simplicity of three chord music, the fact that lovely melodies can come from such simple combinations.

15. Repertoire: Drummer's parents also born in Germany; band plunders their record collection for "obscure cover tunes that fit our style." Avoids the "real popular superhits from Germany." Strive for an "original sound."

[TAPE ONE ENDS]

16. Folk tunes till in the repertoire because "people love to hear 'em and sing along." [Gary Schweinert brings out a list of "standard" tunes that, unfortunately, I forgot to write down.] J mentions "Schone ist die Jugend" (sp?) and "Berg Vagabond" as examples. [Note that these have no connection to the "Dutchman" repertoire, nor did any of the tunes on G's list.]

17. Other German bands in Milwaukee. "Harbor Lights" play a mix of German and American music for economic reasons. "Red River Boys" real popular, two albums out, do pretty much "German standards." "Die Sterne Der Heimat" are popular too, have added synthesizer and play contemporary American songs too (see field notes on this band which played for the Faschingsball at the Park Ponderosa in Madison).

18. G reckons it was like breaking the ice at first to play American numbers. "A lot of them didn't want to accept that."

19. Johnny Hoffmann "has more of an orchestra backing him up" than the other four or five piece bands. He's a generation older. Repertoire is practically

all German.

20. Brief mention of Alte Kameraden, Alpine Trio, and Carl Ratzer as other Milwaukee German bands about whom J and G didn't know too much.

21. G's parents German, came over in 1950s. Dad from southern Germany, mother from the north. They met on the ship coming over. G b. 1960.

22. Started playing at nine or ten, "hated every minute of it." Took lessons from LaDuca brothers. Quit for awhile, started playing again 'cause dad complained of lost investment in lessons and instruments.

[John has to leave at this point.]

23. After high school graduation, G worked as a tool and die maker. Started playing with sister Caroline, drums and vocals, as a two piece band. Then added Bob Birich on guitar, accordion, and occasional bass. Then John Birich when Bob left for Spitzbuben, then Rich-band's old bass player--, then Tim the old guitarist. Then Caroline quit to start playing jazz.

24. C got bored with music. She didn't grow up as "German" as G who didn't speak English when he started school. Music too simple for her jazz interests.

25. G's dad used to play accordion. His cousin came over and was playing too. Dad used to play harmonica. Parents didn't sing too much.

26. G hired a singer in the beginning, but it didn't work out. G had a tough time trying to sing at first, but has worked at it and his voice is now passable--"it's not going to annoy anybody."

27. Backgrounds of those in the band now are mixed. Right now the band, excepting Ken, is "just about all American in background." G taught Julie to sing German words. "This isn't really her kind of music," but it's a chance to sing. When she first joined the band, various complaints about a female singer, especially one who didn't also play an instrument. They complained that "she doesn't know how to sing." Her voice and G's are in the same octave and, at

first, she was harmonizing higher than G when he sang; now she sings low, where people like it, but she can't always put out enough volume to be heard. Reckons German audience is "real stubborn" and hard to get along with. Band often feels tight when playing for German weddings. "But what else can I do?"

28. G doesn't know much about the May Dances (his band's playing for one May 11), except that they pick a queen. They're playing for the DANK Society of Milwaukee (an acronym that G couldn't identify further).

29. Future of German bands: "I think it's gonna die out." Between when G's parents came in 1952 and early 60s many clubs formed among those in mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Lot of youth groups still active, but "in twenty years I don't think there's going to be very much going on anymore." Jefferson Hall on Fond du Lac Avenue now closed. Bavarian Inn no longer has regular dances every Friday night.

30. G thinks Carl Ratzer has more or a "Dutchman," "Oktoberfest style" with brass. Bands like Johnny Hoffmann look more to Europe.

31. Hardly any young people at Harbor Lights' dances except during the "party atmosphere" of Oktoberfest.

32. Harbor Lights going through a struggle, but G reckons to keep band together. Has \$15,000 invested in equipment. Difficult for live bands to play because bands need too much money to play.

33. Harbor Lights are doing lousy this year. Been playing for six years. Made hardly anything first year; second year \$6,000; last year \$22,000. But have more members and, with inflation, little real gain in income.

34. Band generally plays fifty jobs per year with summer as busiest season. Play weddings, Oktoberfest, Germanfest. [Mrs. Schuetzler arrives complaining "What burns here?"]

35. Musicians playing this night with G all inclined to be jazz musicians. No

work of that sort in Milwaukee area, so musicians get into wedding bands.

36. Mrs. Schuetzler descends and the two banter about money, an upcoming wedding for which the band is playing, and so on.

[I shut off the machine and THE SESSION ENDS]