

TAPE INDEX/DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND

Various Parties: Dick Rodgers, Brenda Maroszek, Fritz Wilfahrt, John Maroszek, Mike Maroszek, the Hodkiewieczes
Pulaski Polka Days, Pulaski, WI
July 29, 1989

Int. by JP Leary & R March
Nagra 4-L tape recorder

Tape One

1. Announcement.

Richard March interviews Brenda Maroszek.

2. Brenda b in North Carolina, but grew up in Hofa Park near Pulaski, grew up with polka music.

3. Number of bands in the area named; they really get people going.

4. B always playing and hearing music while growing up.

5. Started playing clarinet in grade school, but Carol, Jenny, and Tammy wanted to start a polka band and asked Brenda to play bass guitar for them. [a good quote]

6. Generally play polka music by ear.

7. Have big jam session for graduations, birthday parties, instruments kept set up in the basement.

8. Parents own Maroszek Excavating Business. Dad, Mike, a drummer who stopped playing with his brothers because he didn't want to travel too much.

9. On the local economics of bands. B bought her own bass, amplifier, microphone, stand. Don't play so much for the money, but for the feeling of satisfaction--playing for people.

10. B always thought bass guitar was for a guy, not quite as bad as the tuba. An accomplishment, however, for five girls to get up and have a band. [splice with prior quote?] B doesn't think they sound like Renata and Girls, Girls, Girls, although they've been compared.

11. B explains how they're all related, then goes through a lineup of the kinship and what each plays. [good stuff]

Leary asks questions.

12. Polish Sweethearts want to sound like Eddie Blazonczyk; also likes Jimmy Weber and the Sounds.

13. Changes Girls, Girls, Girls, done by Alvin Styczynski, to Boys, Boys, Boys.

14. Polka Dimensions know have Rene Otto and their are a few other young women who play polka music in the Pulaski area.

15. When B first started out didn't want people to know she played in a polka band, but then kids came to festival locally, wanted to dance and to play. Like the upbeat not oompah style. [a good quote for the Pulaski show]

Shift to interview with Fritz Wilfahrt.

16. Attributes popularity of Bohemian music in Wausau region to Romy Gosz and Dick Rodgers. Says people their like the harmony of the instruments and the vocals.

17. Best bands develop their own style. F likes groups where musicians can play several instruments so that they can switch around and "do anything."

18. F used to beat his grandfather done with farm chores, then play his button accordion in secret. G'father found him, gave him some tips, and eventually F played for a dance. [good quote] F played button accordion with Don Frodl's band and later on Dick Rodgers' TV show.

19. F learns that he is related to Whoopee John Wilfahrt through contact with Adeline Wilfahrt, Whoopee's daughter.

20. F b. in Detroit, MI, where father worked for Douglas Aircraft. Soon moved to a farm near Auburndale, WI. Received a small piano accordion for Christmas while in grade school, taught himself to play. Played first dance job at 13. Took music lessons at 16. Played with small bands around Auburndale, then played with Don Frodl. Got to know Dick Rodgers when he was also playing at a Mother's Day dance.

21. F praises Dick Rodgers for being a down-to-earth generous guy.

22. F played with Rodgers band. Hard to get musicians together from throughout WI. F has taken over Dick's old band, doesn't play so many jobs.

23. F has recorded a couple of albums and a polka mass.

Dick Rodgers comes up next.

24. D b. and raised on a farm. Dad was a violinist, played by ear, played for weddings. D would go along. Would play for the bride and groom going into and out of the church, then play in the afternoon and on into the night. Usually concertina, violin, sometimes sax, trumpet, drums. [good quote]

25. D's dad used to play with an accordionist, trumpeter, and drummer. Later had a 7 piece band in the 1940s: two trumpets, two saxes, bass horn, piano, and drums. Played lots of weddings.

26. Lawrence Duchow was on radio, Appleton station, every Sunday noon. Romy Gosz popular too. "Those were the two bands I started to idolize." [good quote].

27. The wedding music was more Polish. Duchow and Gosz more Bohemian.

28. D took piano lessons in grade school. Also had to work hard on the farm.

Took music lessons from a local man, but never had enough time to practice. Did learn to read music, however.

29. Got a group together in high school. Played at noon for 45 minutes at school. D played drums and had also picked up concertina. Started playing out twice a week. Radio broadcasts on WDUZ on Monday nights, Waupaca, then out of Marinette on Saturday. Did recordings in early 1950s. Then on TV in 1953 out of Marinette, then Green Bay. Then got syndicated to Wausau, Eau Claire, LaCrosse, Rochester, Rockford, etc. Then the band started to get an array of regional jobs and national jobs (Pillar's Polkabration) and began to take groups on tours.

30. D was never a full time musician. Late 1950s, early 1960s were playing 6-7 nights a week. Played for Monday or Tuesday weddings. Dad had a farm and an insurance agency. D worked for his dad on the farm, started working for the agency in 1952. Was working day and night.

31. In 1937 D's dad started insurance agency. Rodziczak was his name. Was pressured by insurance agency to shorten his name to Rodgers. Did so in 1941.

32. About Rodgers' style. Bought stuff from Vitak-Elsnic, then some fellows in the band did arranging--Elroy Berkholtz, Micky Vetter, and others. D also picked up some Czech music through Emil Jindra's uncle. Jindra (sp?) played with Gosz.

33. Rodgers drawn to Bohemian bands. Polish bands small, Bohemian bigger, more variety. [useful quote? brief]

34. D started booking other bands. Li'l Wally brought by Rodgers to Pulaski, ditto for Eddie Zima. [good quote for making Polish connection with Pulaski]

35. Band could do Gosz, German, Polish, even a little Slovenian with Dick Metko. Liked variety.

36. D talks about Metko's adding of rollicking accordion over the brass and reeds.

[End of Tape One]

Tape Two, Pulaski--Continuation of Dick Rodgers interview followed by other interviews.

1. First records made in Milwaukee on Pfau. Harold Pfau wanted a number to be played four consecutive times. Made several 78s. Fellow named Musselman in Kewaunee got involved with Gosz, Rodgers, and Don Schlies. Universal label. Went to Chicago to record. Recorded at RCA studio after drive through the rain. Couldn't record until 3 AM. Let's Be Happy, Josie Polka, Good Humor, and Who Loves You. Those records did well. Drove back with seven guys in a car and a trailer. Later on a distributor for Decca came through Shawano Lake where Dick's sister had a place. She gave him one of Dick's records. A contract and playing around regionally followed. [long but good quote, excerpts might be used]

2. D b. 1927.
3. When Dick young smaller Polish bands around, then Bohemian style, then Li'l Wally and Chicago Style, then Eddie Blazonczyk. Younger bands like Polkatown Sound, Maroszek Brothers, etc. came on. Slovenian music never went over. Eastern style of Polish not favored, however. [use some of this for Pulaski]
4. Alvin Stycyznski is somewhere between Wally and Eddie B.
5. Local scene involves the Stop Inn every Sunday, 90% Polish bands. Alvin S. once in a while has a dance at Zielinskis. Used to have dances at Hofa Park, Pulaski Picnic Grove, Krakow, and Zielinskis all on a Sunday night, from 1945 until late 1950s. D's son, Tom Rodgers, has a corner bar in Pulaski. Has music now and then.
6. On working bands in the area: booked for weddings, lot of them play for a hobby, although very good. Firemen used to always sponsor dances. Polka Fest holds the local music scene together.
7. D's oldest son, Steve, played with Dick, then had his own band after D sold his band to Fritz. Steve went into the Polish style, had his own band for seven years. Married, has four children, band too hectic. Now plays with other bands. Tom has played with rock bands, as has Steve, but has had polka bands too. Another son David plays concertina, but has gone into playing rock guitar. Played with the Grassroots. Lived in Arizona for awhile, then moved to Green Bay and now plays keyboard with a band out of Mishicot. Daughter Chris played clarinet in school, but never took it further.

Interview with John Maroszek at Pulaski Festival.

8. Grew up going to public dances, hearing polka bands at Polish weddings. Parents didn't play music, mom's uncle played concertina.
9. J joined band after older brothers had formed it. All learned music in school, but learned to play polka style mostly on their own.
10. Band originated in 1972, Gene and Mike, two piece. [concertina and drums] About 1975 Frank on bass guitar, Al a little later. Scott joined in 1982 and John in 1983. [use this? brief]
11. Band plays in Michigan, at Chicago IPA fest, lots at home (weddings) and within 150 miles of Pulaski.
12. We play the Chicago style, Push style, Blazonczyk and Lenny Gomulka.
13. Raise a glass, have a beer, Maroszek Brothers are partying here.
14. Family of thirteen. Five brothers in band (of nine) and four sisters. Another drummer in band, but two brothers not in band play, as does one sister. The rest of them get behind us and party. Some nephews and nieces also play. [could splice bits of 12, 13, 14 together]
15. Came up with Maroszek logo [#13 above] at IPA convention.

16. Brother Al made up four songs: Windup Polka, She's the Girl, I Just Started Thinking of You, and Here We Are Again Waltz. On first album. All with English lyrics. Most singing done by Al, half and half.

17. Kinds of crowds. From 16 to 60 or 70.

18. Thirteen bands out of Pulaski. Alvin, Mike Ryba, everybody kept going from there. . . We listen to all kinds of music, but polka dances are a better local social scene. Young people from Wausau, Stevens Point, Marinette/Menominee come to Pulaski.

19. On Eddie B: really gets the people going. Super having a big name like Blazonczyk in such a small town.

End of John Maroszek interview.

Polka Dimensions taped while playing in the main tent.

20. Intro to an oberek with Richie Hodkiewicz on the vocal. [Horns sound a little flat. Vocals are great.]

21. Before you leave the dance floor, we're going to send out . . . Metka, Metka Polka. Mike Maroszek on introduction. [Fine vocal by Hodkiewicz with nice trumpet, bellowing, drumming, good overall sound. Probably better than prior tune.]

Interview with Richie Hodkiewicz.

22. Got started playing in 1952 with Alvin Stycznski, drummed with Alvin as The Jolly Trio. Then played with the Polkadets for years. Retired when he got married and the family came. Daughter Tracy and a neighbor girl (Otto). were interested. Out came the horn. Because of age span, Mike Maroszek and Frank the "older ones," and different types of music, called band Polka Dimensions. [pretty good quote]

23. F full-blooded Polish. Folks spoke Polish when he was growing up. Took some high school courses to speak and read a little better.

24. Mother loved music, sang. F always listened to polkas when small. Chicago bands used to come to Pulaski to play, that was influential. Also liked Eddie B's newer stuff. Liked Li'l Wally years ago. [okay, tie in with Rodgers bringing Chicago bands to the area]

25. F b. in Menasha, 1936.

Interview with Mike Maroszek.

26. B. in Hofa Park. One of the original Maroszek Brothers with Gene. Tells story of the band beginning about 15 years ago. Pretty soon we had the Maroszek Brothers. Six brothers playing together for 4-5 years before Mike stepped down. Likes Polka Dimensions as "just a little local band." [good quote on band's origins]

27. The Polka Dimensions: Tracy Hodkiewicz, keyboard; Rene Otto, concertina; Mark Sally (sp?), accordion; Mike Maroszek, drums; Richard Hodkiewicz, trumpet; Jerry Koroski (sp?), trumpet, from Oconto Falls.

28. On Mike's drumming: self-taught, idol was Li'l Wally, but mixed up with other Polish styles. Sings with one hand on the drums and one on the Mike.

29. Remembers Norm Dombrowski coming: simple but solid and excellent, Norm an idol.

Tracy Hodkiewicz interviewed.

30. B. in Pulaski in 1972. Idol was Mary Lou Czerniak who played at the Picnic Grounds. T thought Mary Lou was "having so much fun." Inspired to play. [brief but good]

31. Thinks more and more women starting to play polka music. Sometimes people wonder if a girl can really do it.

32. On Pulaski scene. Younger people come out more for the Push style than for the Honky style. Mike Maroszek chimes in with a comparison to Rock. [pretty good quote, two voices]

Mike Maroszek interviews Leary.

33. Leary describes his youth and folklore training and how it drew him to study the polka scene.

34. Frank: when he was a kid, just polka bands and big bands playing.

35. Frank remembers a little bit of concertina, violin, drum, and maybe saxophone in local old time Polish bands. "Mostly concertina music."

36. Over around Bevent mostly Kaszubas. Their Polish dialect different from around the Pulaski area.

37. In the old days there was no Polish hop, "it was just the straight round and round." Now there's a wide variety in how people dance. F traveled to Poland and found that people there didn't dance in the same way.

38. Young people will come to the Pulaski Festival, but not so much to dances in the local halls and taverns.

39. M reckons local polka music will never die.

[the tape runs out]