

TAPE INDEX

Jim Leary
March 29, 1985

Anton "Speedy" Beringer
1100 Liberty
Poy Sippi, WI

1. Collector's announcement. [Hiss of cigarette smoke eater is heard faintly.]
2. Mother, Eva Lazlo, from Budapest; Dad, Anton, from Berlin. Both died at age 84. Migrated to the U.S. in 1908.
3. S born November 7, 1912. Lived in Milwaukee on 15th and Walleet St. in a German settlement. Mother ran a boarding house, dad worked for Palmolive Soap Company.
4. 10 of 14 boarders were Hungarian gypsy musicians. S would listen to 'em, tapping his foot. Bandleader made him a cigar box violin. Began lessons at 4. When he started school thought the alphabet began with C (as in the key of C).
5. At 10 debuted at the Pabst Theater playing "Il Travaotre" on violin. Between 5 and 10 played trumpet, sax, violin, accordion, organ, and drums. Loved music more than school.
6. Formed a five piece band at 11 or 12. Played scores to go with silent films at the Columbia Theater, finished at the Strand at 26th and Center.
7. As a result began to do comedian and burlesque work as a straightman or "stooge."
8. Always interested in baseball, played semi-pro double A ball, had a chance to go to St. Louis Browns camp at 15, but alos chance to play for a marathon dance group in NYC. Dad pushed the latter since he'd paid 50 cents a week for lessons for years.
9. S arrived in NYC with seven cents to play at the Hermitage Hotel. Began playing in Brooklyn and Manhaattan. Joined the Stu Warner Band, then got together a 27 piece band through the union to play for a Lucky Strike radio

program. But as Depression ensued, went back to playing for Marathon Dances. Danced too and won or placed in several contests.

10. S gives the rules for marathon dancing and tells how tips from professional dancers helped him go for 108 days.

11. In Saginaw, Michigan, at Beringer Building, married Lucille Jansen of Minneapolis. Took 4th or 5th place with her at a State Fair in Milwaukee.

12. Then got in with Jack Prince and Heinie's Grenadiers. Prince had had a dog act in Detroit. Could put on a comic German accent and thus got on with Bob Heiss of WTMJ. Became an announcer for the German Hour and put a band together.

13. Band and Heinie broadcast at noon daily. Then got requests to play out in the state.

14. [Years later S had the "Polka Dots."] Then went back to NYC and played awhile but it didn't go well. On the way back stopped in Cleveland and heard Yankovic playing in a tavern. Did rewrites with him and played with him too for a little while. Yankovic "was more or less independent . . . a hard man to deal with, but he was good hearted in his own way."

15. Met Lawrence Welk and Myron Floren at Anton Karpek's shop in Milwaukee where S tested accordions. They were piano accordion players, but liked to hear him play chromatic accordion.

16. Polka styling and piano accordion began to be big in the 1940s.

17. Distinctions made between piano accordion, semi-tone or diatonic button accordion, and chromatic accordion.

18. [S jumps back to the 1930s] Teamed with Red Skelton doing comedy.

19. In 1940s S chose between music and a steady income. Jazz era was fading, guitars coming in. Little place for the accordion as a money-maker.

20. Ran taverns, resorts, sold boats. Resort at Tichigan Lake had a dance hall

and many jam sessions were held with Johnny Pecon, Yankovic, "The Silk Umbrella Man" (Louie Bashell), Mary Ford, Liberace.

21. Johnny Olson (now with Bob Barker?) an old friend who asked S to come out to Hollywood, but he turned him down.

22. S retired at 55. They sold all and traveled to Florida--Big Pine Keys. Played music there with the "Grandpa and Grandma Band." Promoted a flea market for a Catholic church.

23. Band played for seniors throughout south Florida, in great demand.

24. Finally decided to return to Wisconsin where most of eight children live.

25. Still plays out locally at Idle House, Green Lake, Town and Country, Senior Citizens' events, etc. Enjoys giving back memories to older folks.

26. [S ends his soliloquy and Leary begins to ask questions.] S gained his first chromatic accordion while going around and playing in saloons with his godfather. Deal made that if S could play one tune on the chromatic after a week (since the tavernkeeping owner couldn't play one tune after a year), he could have it. He was able to play two tunes.

[The tape runs out and this story is finished on tape two.]

26. (continued).

27. Eventually S worked out how to play harmony chords with his chromatic accordions. Many accordion players have been amazed by this and S has given them tips.

28. His accordion is a professional model with four octaves so he can produce harmony chords.

29. Complains about the volume and simplicity of rock music. He does like Ricky Nelson, Glen Campbell, and Don Williams because of their stress on melody. Likens the rhythms of rock and roll to the war drum music of African tribes.

30. Big band music is returning to the scene in Wisconsin and S predicts it

will return.

31. Wore Prussian grenadier uniforms with Heinie: red and black with shoulder braids.
32. Jack Prince (Heinie) put on his German accent, patterned after the talk of a comedian called "Baron Munchhausen." Provides dialect example of the tale about turning a lion inside out by reaching down his throat and grabbing the end of his tail. [S has trouble with the dialect and throws in an Irish "begorrey."]
33. Played "all the ballrooms . . . all over the state," in Chicago too. Had their own bus. Bob Heiss, sports announcer for WTMJ, managed the group. S had met him when playing for marathon dances in 1930. There were live broadcasts from the marathon site periodically during the day.
34. Played "all German numbers" with Heinie's Grenadiers; old time German numbers: waltzes, polkas, laendlers, two steps. Lots of German people in Wisconsin who wanted to hear this.
35. Was with the Grenadiers around 1938-1939. Musicians doubled up on instruments. S played baritone, violin, and accordion; Joe Putzner played bass horn, guitar, and violin; Jimmy ? handled trumpet and sax. Often the band had 12-14 players on the road, with some musicians from local 8 supplementing a core of seven who were regulars on the radio program.
36. Played with a five piece band, "The Hungry Five," on WGN and WLS in Chicago: bass horn, two trumpets (doubling on clarinet, sax, trombone), drums, and accordion. Played Ted Weems, Tommy Dorsey, etc.
37. Music when with Heinie was from Germany; although many Milwaukee music stores carried German sheet music too.
38. Heinie's mother was German. He played no instrument, but directed the

band, MCed, joked with the crowd.

39. "Polka Dots" were formed from jam sessions at S's 8900 Bar in West Allis. Customers that came in coalesced into a band. Arnie Polzin, once president of local 8, was in the band on bandoneon. This was in the mid-to-late 1940s.

40. Had the "Rainbow Serenaders" in 1933-1934, 7-12 piece. But it was very tough to keep a band together during the Depression. Much competition for little work. [This is a long excerpt that is largely irrelevant to German-American matters, but is otherwise interesting.]

41. Played two nights with Pee Wee King in Chicago at the Trianon. [I think S is confusing Pee Wee King with Wayne King. Elsewhere he mixes up Bert Parks and Bob Barker and Ray Price with Charlie Pride.]

42. S remembers Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, and also Kitty Wells at the WLS Barn Dance.

[TAPE TWO ENDS]

43. Heinie's Grenadiers introduction: "Ach Du Lieber Augustine."

44. "Mariechen Waltz."

45. "Bummel Petrus." (sp?)

46. "Du Kanst Nicht Treusein."

47. "Laendler #13."

48. "^{Zwei}~~Drei~~ Herzen . . ." (Two Hearts Beat in 3/4 Time).

49. "Muss I Den."

50. "Bohemian Wald" (with yodeling).

51. "Mein Hut Der Hat Drei Ecken."

52. A March: Under the Double Eagle.

53. "Ich Bin Ein . . ." ("I Have No Family Anymore," a song about the "heimat" and one of his dad's and godfather's favorites.)

54. A Soldier's song from 1885 says S, from the singing of his dad and

godfather who were both infantrymen in the Austro-Hungarian army.

55. "Holzhacker March."

56. "The Birds in the Forest Are Singing I Am Coming Home." (I couldn't catch the German title here.)

57. "Trink Bruderlein, Trink." (Only a fragment before the tape expires.)

[TAPE THREE AND THE SESSION END]