

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDIAN PROJECT

Tape Notes
5/4/84
jwb

INTERVIEW WITH: Frankie Smoltz

AT: Smoltz Home
523 SW 5th Street
Chisholm, MN 55719
218/254-4738

Tapes: Reels; SBB 06,07
Cassette CSBB 4,5
Slides: Sheet 2; 1-6

DATE: May 4, 1984

Note: Both interviewer and interviewee were ill. JB had a cold. FS was just getting over the flu. The interview is slow and choppy.

Frankie was born in Chisholm, at home, two blocks down the same street as he lives on now. He is 68. His parents came from Ribenca, Yugoslavia, to Chisholm around 1910-11. His father worked in the underground mines, had a heart attack, and then went to work for the schools as a janitor. He died in 1934. Frankie had to support the family then and went to work for the city half time. His brother moved away to Detroit to work.

Frankie started to play music at the age of four. He used to pretend to play with the insert from an egg crate. He would run around the house singing and playing with the egg crate insert. His father sent for a one-row button accordion from Montgomery Ward and Frank learned to play a few songs. His parents bought him a 2-row and his playing improved. (Frankie brought out a photo of him at age 9 with the 2-row box.) When he was 9 he traveled to Duluth as part of an amateur talent contest and performed on stage at a theater. He won the contest in Chisholm and then in Virginia. He won a trip to Duluth.

Frank learned to play by listening to others singing and listening to other players. Louie Nosan boarded with the Smoltz family and taught him some things. The Smoltz family was known for its hospitality to newly arrived Yugoslavs.

He talks about playing on radio station WMFG, Hibbing, in 1936, on ethnic programs. He would play every Monday and others wanted to play. Frank Tekautz began to organize the programs. They sponsored a picnic at the fairgrounds--the beginning of All Slav Day Picnic. (Note: Continues to this day at Eveleth, Ely Lake Park, the last Sunday in July. jb) Eight groups would play, coming from all across the range. They combined programming with WHLB, Virginia-- one-half of the broadcast was from Hibbing and one-half from Virginia.

As for musical background, Frankie had no training. He took a few lessons on the violin but didn't want to learn that instrument. The director of the band, Louie Regis, hollered at him. Frank broke the bow. Frank would hide from him because he was afraid of him. When Frank's daughter was in school she took lessons from Regis. He would ask the students, "Who's not afraid of me?" All of the students were except Frank's daughter who spoke up and said, "I'm not afraid of you like my father was." Frank started to play the piano accordion after he left school. Today he plays the piano accordion more than the button box. He has a Cordovox. He has played professionally, at weddings and parties. He didn't have a car so people had to come and pick him up.

Slovenians have gathered at their house singing and drinking wine. He has played the songs all his life and never gets tired of them. Music has been important to Frankie. "I'd never be where I am today if I didn't have the accordion."

Frank talked about traveling--the band that went along--to Europe and Hawaii. He talks about playing every Saturday at a dance hall above a morgue. He went on a campaign trip for Rudy Perpich.

His button accordion is a 4-row Mervar, purchased in 1935 or '36 for \$135.00. He had a 3-row Lubas earlier. It was his "Christmas accordion"--red and green colors. He bought the Mervar from the builder in Cleveland. The keys are A-D-G-C. The band members told him those were the best keys for them. Frank doesn't read music so the keys made no difference to him. The accordion was sent to him when it was finished and he has had no problems with tuning. It has a flat fingerboard. Frank can't play stepped or "German" fingerboard. He talked about the difference in fingering. The flat fingerboard is "Slovenian" style

Frank talked about his role in the film "Wildrose", his appearance on TV in Yugoslavia, and the reaction of the audience to an American playing Slovenian music.

end cassette side 1

Note: Frank picks up the accordion, microphones reset to record music. JB/s voice is distant.

Frank starts with the first song he ever learned on the 2-row box.

* "O Yagerchick" (sp?) "The Hunter"

short refrain

Frank demonstrates one-row playing, then 2-row--"better". "3-row is better yet, 4-row is better yet. God gave me the gift of playing, that's all I can say. Music was all my life." - good radio

edit JB's?

*"Yespoti"

JB: "Where did you learn that---"

FS: "People singin' 'em and records." Hoyer Trio was his favorite. Hoyer Trio was his favorite.

"See, I can listen to a song and in a few minutes I'd learn the song by heart, you know. I didn't need the music. Then I'd make my own version of the song." - good radio needs only some clean up narrative

"Lot a guys ask me how I play that, I don't know. I just play it." "Oh, here's one I always gotta play."

"Klabasa" "Sausage" Polka - good for vocal over narrative

"Pod Moje^m" - Waltz

FS: "This is a song the Governor likes."

"S^mroj Nemoj Ti" - Waltz, Croatia

pause

" - Waltz

"Poidi Zemnoj" (sp?) "Come With Me" - Waltz

FS: Sing? No. Oh, once in awhile. I can't concentrate on singing and playing at the same time. Oh, once in awhile. I ain't got a good voice."

" - Waltz sounds like "Santa Lucia"

" - Waltz

Frank talks about three extra buttons in the center, a fifth row. He plays to show their use in the chord. "That's just like an extra row."

"She's Too Fat For Me" - Polka

"We Left Our Wives at Home" - Polka S. waltz original?

"Moja Dekla" - Polka

Accordions he owns:

Cordovox, piano accordion, button accordion and small piano accordion.

Frank talks about "We Left Our Wives at Home". "I made that song." He sings a few words. and plays "...Left Our Wives..." again.

FS: They didn't pay us nothing for that. We got \$40.00. Wasn't that \$40.00, mother?" "In 1950."

"Here Comes Julie Barja" Radio show theme song

blends into short medley slow polka

to waltz - "Dai Dai"

end cassette 4, side 2

cassette 5, side 1 starts with quote about \$40.00. See above.

"Dai Dai"

To another waltz

"Over Three Hills" - Waltz

session ends