

FIELD NOTES

Jim Leary & Lewis Koch
April 11, 1985

Roland Braun
N. 78 St.
Milwaukee, WI

I had read about Rolly Braun's zither playing in the Deutsches Zeitung and he had also been recommended as someone to see by Bill Neumann, proprietor of Zur Krone. Consequently I called Braun up and arranged for an afternoon session. Two nights prior to the appointed date, I met Braun's piano accordionist, Jean Rex, at Zur Krone.

Lewis and I found the place with little problem. The house's exterior was in plaster and wood suggesting European heavy frame construction. Once inside we saw that German motifs were everywhere in evidence. There were posters displaying the Bavarian alps, a cuckoo clock, and a shelf packed with old world artifacts: Hummel figures playing instruments; assorted beer steins, boots, and glasses from Munich and elsewhere; a long stemmed pipe with a cap over the bowl. Mrs. Mary Braun, met us and we soon learned that she was born in Austria in 1920 and had come over to Wisconsin with her parents in 1923. Rolly was born in this country and his biography, along with Jean's, is summarized on the tape index.

Rolly and Jean had their respective instruments set up, but we decided to conduct the interview first. R was quite willing to talk, but his answers were rather terse and void of anecdote. The same applied to Jean. Once their playing began, it was all business too. They had a clear sense of how they wanted to sound and we experimented with various microphone placements until the right sound was achieved. This experience contrasts considerably with the rural and country dance hall musicians we're used to recordings. We taped roughly twenty numbers, some in two or three versions. Thereafter Lewis took pictures as I put the equipment away.

When our documentary work was over, Rolly brought out several 78s and an LP that he'd recorded with "The Jolly Alpine Boys," a band that's now defunct:

The Jolly Alpine Boys, "The Vrenelli Polka" (Uf Em Weg Zum Vrenelli) b/w

"The Jolly Alpine Boys Laendler" (Die Lustigen Bergl Baum Laendler), Pfau.

_____, "Bavarian Joy Laendler" (Bayrische Freunde Laendler) b/w "The County Fair Polka" (Am Baendner Ball in Zuerich), Pfau.

_____, The Jolly Alpine Boys--Past and Present, Draeger Recording, Racine, P4LP1090.

The personnel on the record includes: Rollie Braun, clarinet; Al Mueller, zither; Victor Weinfurter, button accordion; ^{Howard Lesniak} Howie ?, tuba; and Frieda Haese, vocals/yodels. [It's worth noting that Al Mueller is currently a member of the Vienna Strings and is commented on elsewhere in these notes; meanwhile Frieda Haese, who plays hammer dulcimer, is the subject of a May 1 session.]

Rollie played excerpts from these recordings and mentioned that he'd listened to plenty of 78s from Europe while a kid. He also pulled out field recordings of Austrian music made by Chris Strachwicz for the Arhoolie label. Asserting that his band's style and his own aesthetic tended toward Europe's alpine music, R reckoned he didn't like the clunky farmer music of the rural upper midwest's "Dutchman" bands--a sentiment echoed earlier by Anton "Speedy" Beringer.

By the time we had listened to a few records it was past 5 PM. So we said goodbye and headed off for a quick meal before traveling to Altenburg's Concertina Bar.