

Name of Uncle for Aurora?

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDION PROJECT

jwb
field notes
6/7/84

Mary and Joe (Sr.) Gotchnik
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Tapes: Reels SBB 31,32
Cassettes CSBB 21
Slides: Sheet 7; 1-5

After John Erzar called to introduce me, I went to see the Gotchniks. They live in a house on the corner, with a big yard, very neatly kept, a large garden, virtually weed-free. Mary is the player. I had heard about her from several people at the May 19th jam session. I knocked at the front door, but there was no answer. I could see her through the door. She was in the kitchen, so I walked around to the back door, knocked and was called in. Mary wanted to know what I was doing, so I explained that I was working on a project about button accordion players, that everyone I talked to was a man and that I wanted to talk to a woman who played. She liked that idea and offered me a chair at the kitchen table. She told John Erzar over the phone that I had to come right away because she was going someplace. It turned out that it was to a wake, so I asked her if I could come back to interview her, bringing my tape recorder. Today was Thursday, Friday was out because she had to work at Vertin's Cafe, frying chicken for 350 wedding guests, but Saturday morning was OK. (Note: she is 74, Joe is 79)

Joe came in from the living room where he had been napping and the three of us talked for about half an hour.

Joe said he was "crazy to get one in Yugoslavia, but no money." He plays a little now, but it is Mary who has become the musician in the family. Joe: "You don't play much when you work in the mines. Come home tired all the time." He shrugs his shoulders.

They had a three-row Mervar accordion that they ordered by mail. One day, a few years later, Anton Mervar drove up to the house "in a station wagon with the back full of accordions." Joe: "He asks, "Are you so and so' 'Ya' I said. 'You got a button box?' 'Ya. I got one.' 'Well, I'm the one who made it.' 'You're Mervar? From Cleveland? Come in, come in. Who's that in the car? Bring him in, too' 'Oh. no, that's my son. He'll be all right there.' He wanted us to buy a new accordion, but that was Depression times. We didn't have no money." Mary: "He was only working part time, then."

Mervar offered to take the three-row as a trade in on a new four row. They haggled and made a deal. "He had lots of accordions, gold, black, silver, whatever you wanted," said Joe. "I told him, 'Bring the silver,' and he brought this."

Mary: "It wasn't too long after that he died. "

Joe: "He drowned. He went off the road and into the water. A bridge or something. A river."

Mary: Ya, him, and his wife was with him and all those accordions. Ya, two weeks after he left here I wrote to him that I wanted that old one back. This one was too hard to play. That little one, I was used to it. It takes a long time to learn how to play a big one, but he sold the other one. He sold it right away. This one, now it's too hard for me, my shoulders. It's too heavy. I have a hard times sometimes."

Joe talked about the loss of Mervar, how his daughter sold off the accordions and the business. he mentioned the son saying something about how he's got no kind of son. Apparently the son was handicapped.

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Mary Gotchnik, cont.

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cont.

Mary mentioned Rudy Jandrey, asking if I had talked to him, yet. I told her I was going there that evening. "We're godparents to him," she said. "Oh, he's a good player, but he plays so hard. He's got lots of accordions."

I thanked them both, shook hands again, promised to be there at 9:30 A.M. on Saturday, and left.