

Contact: Ray Maki
Address: Washburn, Wisconsin
Ethnic group: Finnish
Fieldworker: Matthew Gallmann
Date: Thursday, May 17, 1979

At 3:30 Dianne Bolinder told me about an ad in the Evergreen Shopper advertising a button accordian and a "chromatic" accordian. At 4:30 I followed this lead in my own interests for I want to acquire a button accordian. I called the number given in the advertisement. A woman answered the phone and upon my inquiring about the accordian she said, "you must want to talk to Ray Maki."

Ray came to the phone and explained that it was a package deal including an amplifier and a Hohner button accordian. Then he mentioned something about the accordian being the type the Scandinavians play. Ray mentioned that he sells alot of accordians and even repairs some instruments. Ray invited me to come look at the instruments he had at his house. I asked him if 6:00 would be o.k. and he said that would be fine because he was just now sitting down to dinner.

I left Ashland at 5:30 heading west on Rt.2 then north on 13 past Washburn to the Onion River tavern. Ray's house is right next door to the tavern which is halfway between Washburn and Bayfield.

I parked the car in front of Ray's house and got out of my car. I saw two women looking at flowers in the front yard. One woman was obviously older than the other. I asked if Ray was around and the younger of the two said that I could find Ray in the house. I walked into the house and was greeted by Ray, a large man of about 50 to 60 years of age. His handshake was firm and he had a pleasant air about him.

I brought my button accordian along with me and that was our first conversation piece. He said that it was an old timer and probably a cheap model.

We talked about how it leaked air and how I tried to fix the bellows with tape. We also noted how it was odd that there was no manufacturer's marking on my instrument. Ray explained that the buttons on my accordian were too high off of the instrument for him to play comfortably.

I played "Redwing" on my accordian in my usual fashion. Because of my inadequacy on the instrument I played the tune alone with my right hand on the C row of buttons, without chord accompaniment. After I put the instrument down Ray commented on my style of playing. He mentioned that he noticed I only played on one row of buttons.

Ray gave me his accordian to play and I played a polka on it in my style, but I had trouble due to the fact that this Hohner had no thumb strap. Ray now explained that he plays on both rows of buttons to avoid "that jerky motion". In other words using both rows of buttons enables you to play the accompaniment easily because theoretically you have all the notes you need going out or coming in. Then Ray explained that the thumb strap bothers him so he doesn't use the strap on his right hand. Instead he guides his thumb along the button board and has a strap that goes from the top of the accordian, around his shoulder and straps at the bottom of the accordian.

At this point Ray took the accordian that was for sale and began playing. I showed him that I was excited about what he was playing. I watched Ray execute long motions with his accordian while he played on both rows with his right hand and played accompaniment with his left hand.

The accompaniment was only a tonic and a V chord. It seems that Ray doesn't use a IV chord in places where my ear calls for that chord.

Now Ray explained that he is a hard worker, a trapper by trade. He said that he has arthritis and his fingers are messed up a bit from chopping wood and hard work. "Hard work" is a theme he brings up often.

Then he told of how he cut his hand when he was younger with a knife. "That was back in the days when I drank", he said.

Ray picked up his new three row button accordion and played some tunes. He showed me how he could change the timbre of the instrument with a switch under the button board. He bought this instrument in south Chicago.

Ray talked about how he often buys, sells, and trades instruments. He seems like a trader. He is a salesman in some respects. He likes to deal and trade things.

Now we got down to business and talked about the button accordion he is selling. I explained that I wanted to buy the accordion without the amplifier. He told me that he turned down a man from Chicago that wanted to buy the accordion for his daughter, because he didn't want to buy the amplifier either. Then I asked if he had any other instruments around and he went and got a piano accordion made in Ukraine about a hundred years ago. Ray doesn't play this instrument but bought it in a package deal.

Ray and I began to talk money. He said that he would let me take the mess if I paid one third of the price. He asked me where I worked and I told him Northland College and a band. Then he brought up "the guy from Chicago" and told me how this guy had a \$12,000 trailer yet he couldn't spring for the accordion. He told me I should get the money from my folks. "You're spending it on something worthwhile. You're not old enough to drink yet so it's money well spent," he said.

I noticed that the time was getting late and I asked him if I could borrow his phone. I had to call Felix Milanowski to set up our interview for this evening.

I used the phone and then Ray and I exchanged addresses and I told him I would be back on Monday if I could. And I said I would come and play music with him even if I didn't buy the accordion. This seemed to excite him and that made me feel good.

Throughout the interactions when Ray would play the songs he would say "this is a Swedish one" or "this is a Finnish waltz" or "this is a Norwegian polka."

I think that Ray will be a very good contact. He talked about playing in the old days at dances. He mentioned that his brother plays accordian"over in the settlement", meaning the Finnish settlement outside of Washburn.

As I was leaving the house I noticed that the sheet of paper we wrote our addresses on was a program from a Finnish celebration in Oulu. We looked at the program and I mentioned that I knew Walt and Ailie Johnson as I noticed their names on the list. He mentioned that he used to play music with Walt about thirty years ago.

I left the house kind of hurriedly and said I hoped to see him again.

Further, his mother-in-law lives in the Maki's house.