

TAPE INDEX

DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND RADIO PROGRAM

Ray & Randy Dorschner
Menasha, WI
Recorded Red Barn Polka Festival
Evansville, WI
May 1, 1988

Recorded by Jim Leary & Richard March
Ampex 632 tape
Nagra 4-L recorder

1. Announcement.
2. Born Zittau, WI, Winnebago County, 1929. Dad an old time fiddler. Family band with fiddle, piano accordion, mandolins. Hillbilly music for showers, weddings, barn raisings. Had German band, Jolly Musicians, in high school on Winnecone. After high school formed Rainbow Valley Dutchmen, 7 then 8 piece, 1950. First band with two brothers in it. Randy, Ray's son, inspired by Elmer Scheid, rewrote the band book for nine piece so Randy could play.
- * 3. Dad, Theodore ("Ted"), Sr. Brothers Ted Jr. and Larry played in the band, some polkas, waltzes, schottisches, novelty dances like "Herr Schmidt," and hillbilly music. Played 2-3 hour jobs.
4. As a little kid Ray spoke only German until 6. Band played German songs.
5. Grandfather on Dad's side born in Bohemia. Maternal grandparents from Germany.
- * 6. Ray played button accordion at 6 or 7. Only started playing at 5 or 6 years ago. Old Hohner Ray plays now goes back to 19th century, got for him by his brother Larry who works at Brown's Music in New Ulm, MN.
- * 7. Revival of button accordion has spread very quickly within the past decade. Not sure why this has happened. Does think it gives an old German, old Austrian sound. "It's definitely different."
- * 8. Band name based on Indian name for Fox River Valley, Rainbow Valley. Dutchman for the style of music. Inspired by Whoopee John heard on WCCO radio every Saturday night. Six Fat Dutchmen traveled into the area. But really moved by the nice, smooth, clean style of Babe Wagner. Started a little ahead of Elmer Scheid, but reckons he has the same style. After awhile people less satisfied with the smooth style and precise arrangements. Band started to get away from pretty sounds. Have 50-60 originals that get a little more "wild." Jazzy, syncopation, diminished chords. Randy a big force here. Musicians just can't sit up and sound pretty any more. Band needs life, has to move around.
9. Three sons now in band. Randy on sax, clarinet, tuba, and concertina. Steve on trumpet, flugelhorn, guitar, and banjo. Jim on tuba and trombone.
10. Front line moves a lot. Does a lot of accents and dynamics. Lots of instrument switching and style changing. Does some Dixieland, C&W, Big Band jazz.

11. For sound and to give horn players a break, will shift down to concertina, tuba, drums. Concertina very popular these days.
12. Ray likes bigger band for versatility. Has Austrian sound with trumpet, clarinet, tuba and guitar with vocal trio. Also does the hoolerie style sometimes with clarinets and horn obligato filling in, like a trombone, and tuba, drums, concertina. Style popularized by Scheid.
- * 13. About German bands in the Lake-to-Lake region. Most heavily influenced by the Gosz style. Jerry Schneider falls here. Cites also "Manitowoc Style." Gene Heier, Dolyesh Brothers, Rudy Plocar. Involves going back and forth from clarinets to trumpets. R plays more a "full sound."
14. Band started as a New Ulm influenced band. Now chiefly in their own style.
- * 15. Arrangements include short and long notes, accents, etc., so as to capture fairly precisely the band's aesthetic. Improvisation comes more in dynamics and in subtle interplay.
- * 16. "Putzig Polka" named for Zittau, WI, because all the old Germans used this word, meaning "polish" to refer to Zittau. Also do "Village Blacksmith Laendler." R's dad a blacksmith in Zittau, tune comprises two older German tunes. Also write a number of tunes named after polka festivals, "Ellsworth Festival Polka" a big tune.
17. Tunes come when driving somewhere. Ray notes down the tune as soon as he can. Tunes just come, can't find them otherwise.
18. Several trademarks. Six Fat Dutchman had a fat fellow who played a little cornet. They had an artist draw another little fellow with a sax, Ray's instrument. Also have an Emmett Kelly doll as their mascot for 38 years. Has been stolen several times but recovered.
19. Recommended cuts. Thinks their recent LP is the best they've ever done, thinks the band is the best. Likes "Ellsworth Fest Polka," "Rainbow Valley Polka," "Putzig Polka," "Schuhplattler Laendler."
20. When not playing polka music, Ray is a Senior Research Scientist for American National Can Company of Neenah. Is now standardizing all of their test instruments and methods for all of their plants.
21. About methods of dealing with slighting remarks about polka avocation. Reckons they do it so well, they can hold their heads up. Thinks some radio stations play cornball, sloppy polka music, worthy of low brow status. Mentions Dr. John Check with his Ph.D. and music teacher players.

[Randy Dorschner is interviewed next]

- * 22. Born 1953 in Menasha. Born into old time music. Went to dances with his dad, including New Ulm Polka Days, the only big polka festival then. Inspired by Babe Wagner, Elmer Scheid, Six Fat Dutchmen then. In 5th grade wanted to learn to play clarinet to be in the band, also picked up sax on his own in 8th grade, then started with the band in the summer 1967. Learned a little

concertina and tuba so they could switch around some; concertina duets, or Randy on tuba while tuba player played trombone.

23. Randy's played on fill-in basis with John Check, Norm Edlebeck, Karl and the Country Dutchmen. Like a jam with Karl because there's no written music, challenging and fun. Played with college jazz band, had high school Dixieland band at pizza place in Menasha.

[end of session]