

SLOVENIAN BUTTON ACCORDIAN PROJECT

Tape Notes  
5/5/84  
jwb

INTERVIEW WITH: Joe Deslich and Frank Wadnal

AT: Joe Deslich Home  
225 8th St. N.W.  
Chisholm, MN

Tapes: Reels SBB 11,12,13  
cassettes CSBB 8,9  
Slides: Sheet 2; 11-14,15-18

DATE: May 5, 1984

Joe Deslich was born in Chisholm. His mother comes from Blasefia, "more on the Croatian side", and his father from Metlika, Novo Mestro. His father was a miner. Joe worked in the mines underground and then with the trestle gang outside. After that he did some construction and carpentry.

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When Joe was ten years old he begged his dad for an accordion and got a two row Hohner. It was hard to learn, there was nobody to teach him anything. He knew the songs and on Saturday and Sunday the boarders wanted him to play but he was bashful. The boarders would sit in the kitchen and Joe would climb to the top of the stairs and sit up there and play. He got a three row Lubas when he was seventeen. As he grew older, got a job, married (1936), he found less and less time to play and actually gave it up only to start again after his retirement when he bought a new accordion, a Novak. There were not too many players when he was a kid. One old fellow showed him a few things but he learned mostly on his own. He felt it was most important just to know the songs. He played for himself. Joe belongs to the Mesabi B.B. Club and once a week they practice. He travels with the club to events and performances at places like Rock Springs, Fort Frances, Milwaukee, Interpretative Center at Chisholm and an appearance on the Chimelski TV show.

Joe stated the price for accordians has jumped. An accordion costing \$1,178 six or seven years ago would now cost \$3,400. He has a four row Novak made in Austria.

JB: "How do you buy one?"

Joe: Shops in Milwaukee and Cleveland have them on the shelf. He ordered his and waited eight months before he got notice that they just started to make it. The second notice said it was half done and the third notice said it was all finished and coming by mail on a certain date. He was glad to get it. UPS wouldn't let him open it until after he paid \$1,000. It was not the accordion he ordered. He wanted Slovenian fingering and he got German fingering. Castignolio, a dealer in Detroit who arranged the sale, received two accordians. The wrong one was sent to Seattle. Castignolio wanted Joe to send his back so they could change the fingering but he wouldn't do it. It was too much trouble. The fingering is a little different but he learned to play it anyway.

He was influenced as a kid by Leonard Hiti, photographer and button box player who would come to his house. He has had seven accordians, two are piano accordians. He can't play the piano accordians as well and prefers button accordians which he can play. He finds playing joyful and enjoys it a lot, especially with the Mesabi Button Box Club or 'the gang', as he calls them. He likes to be on stage and to make people happy. It is something to look forward to.

Frank Wadnal and Joe Deslich have known each other all their lives. They got together through accordian playing. Frank was born in Chisholm and is 66 years old. His father comes from Festojna Jama (which means 'Caves'), Slovenia, near the Italian border. His mother is from Ribnica. His mother and father met in Chisholm. His father lived in Cleveland before that. His brother and sister, Frank's aunt and uncle, were on the Range. <sup>FRANK'S</sup> His mother and her two sisters came directly to the Range. His father was a blacksmith by trade in Slovenia but he couldn't work at that trade here. He went to work contract mining and later worked the open pit mines. Frank himself worked at U.S. Steel for 41 years, first as a gang laborer, then on the drill rigs and finally at the Minntac plant as a maintenance man repairing machinery.

1316 As a youngster he was fascinated by the button box. As a kid he went to weddings and wanted to learn to play the accordian. His dad bought a Lubas, Slovenian style, for himself, learned one song and quit. Frank started playing and got some hints from other family friends and played for family gatherings. His interest 'kind of died down and just came back and picked up steam' in the early 1970's. He lost interest in the Button Box Club. He sold one old accordian and bought a German style Melodija in 1979. He picked up from when he was a kid when he started at age 12 and has learned more in the last few years. He tapes other players in the club.

There is music in his family. He has relatives of his dad, the Vadnal family, in Cleveland--first cousin to his father. His mother liked to sing a lot and he learned songs from her. He had no cassette tapes then. It is easier now--he had to go to the dance and listen and then go home and try to play.

Frank has two children--a daughter who played trumpet and a son who plays piano and has a band in Wisconsin Rapids. Music means a lot now that he's retired. He tries to learn new tunes and this keeps him going, something he lives for.

Joe is from a family of six children--3 boys and 3 girls. He is the oldest boy. His second brother played clarinet and was asked to play at weddings in Leetonia location. He got paid for this and when the school band director heard about it he took him out of the music education program in the school. x Joe's brother-in-law in Nashwauk played and gave him a Slovenian box. He was too busy working and

x Louis Reois was band director in Chisholm. See SMOLTZ notes.

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raising his family. With six boarders his mother didn't have much time to sing. He heard Croatian/Serbian songs. The boarders sang Croatian songs. He didn't want to play tamburitza, so he chose the button box. His father-in-law had a piano accordian.

Joe has three children--a son in Chisholm, a second son in Piqua, Ohio, who plays accordian, and a daughter in Chisholm. He has 12 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

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SONGS:

Both:

'Trzinka'

'Over 3 Hills'

'Grampa John'

'Moja Deckla' - Joe's solo

'Slovenian Home Polka' - Frank's solo

Both:

Polka

'Zapula'

'4 Step Waltz'

Pecon Waltz

'O Ja' *and side B cassette*

Frank:

Polka

\*Waltz

Polka

Both:

Polka

*Frank Left  
Joe Right*

Slovenian Button Accordion Project

jwb 1  
field notes  
prelim

Joe Deslich Age 72  
225 8th St NW  
Chisholm, MN 55719  
218 254 2808

Interview recorded Saturday, May 5, 1984, 10:30 A.M. in the Deslich living room. Frank Wadnal joined us after about 30 minutes. Joe had spoken to him the day before and called him shortly after I arrived.

Joe was a bit nervous about the recording equipment. His interest in the button box is a renewal after his retirement. His parents immigrated from Austria(Yugoslavia) in 1905. Father was Slovenian, mother "more on the Croatian side." His working life has been varied, several different jobs, underground mines, carpenter. He started playing the button box at age 10, but was bashful. He talked about life in a boarding house and growing up in Chisholm. For details, see transcript of interview.

Joe has a Novak accordion and tells the story of ordering it and waiting for it to arrive, finding it was not what he ordered. Wrong fingering. German style, not Slovenian style. Had to learn over. Didn't want to send it back.

Member of the Mesabi Button Box Club.

Mentions brother as player and his experience with Louis Regis, Chisholm schools music teacher.(see also F.Smoltz)

FRANK

Joe Wadnal arrived, sat and listened to conversation with Joe, then answered questions himself. See Frank Wadnal notes.

The two played together. Frank has a Melodija accordion.

Mrs. Deslich fixed lunch, BBQ beef, between interviews and music recording. Chatted about travels with Mesabi Button Box club, other players. Joe owns two accordions, 3-row F.Lubas, Slovenian fingering, and 4-row Novak, German fingering.

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Cassettes; CSBB 8,9  
Slides: Sheet 2; 11,12,13,14

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Frank Wadnal  
1000 1st Avenue NW  
Chisholm, MN 55719  
218 254 4090

Interview recorded at home of Joe Deslich, 225 8th St NW, Chisholm, Saturday, May 5, 1984, 10:30 A.M.

Frank arrived in the early part of interview with Joe, in response to invitation from Joe. They had talked earlier and Joe asked if it was all right for Frank to come over, too. I said OK. See Joe Deslich notes, transcript.

Frank spoke about his family background, parents from Yugoslavia, father from near Italian border, mother from Ljubljana. He has worked for USSteel. Renewed interest in button box, purchased new Melodija in 1979 is member of Mesabi Button Box Club. His box has German fingering. He thinks he may be related to Vadnal family of Cleveland, musical family of some renown in polka circles, recording artists. Married, has son and daughter.

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