

TAPE INDEX

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Mel Knaack  
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Watertown, WI

1. Dad, Arthur, resided in Columbus until 7 or 8, came to live after parents' death with an uncle in Watertown. He walked all the way. Worked several years on a farm around Oconomowac, saved money to rent a farm in the Watertown area.
2. Mel had two sisters, Marian (Lehman) and Shirley (Brechtter). Dad liked polka music and always went to dances: mostly house dances, but hall dances were starting up again. When M was 6 or 7, dad bought him a concertina. Discovered the DeWitz gave lessons, and he and sister started to take them. They had to shift the grip on their concertina to suit small hands.
3. Marian played for Hustisford Concertina Club. Family bought another concertina through Irving DeWitz.
4. M stopped playing for a long time. Years later interest rekindled while attending Minnesota polka festivals. Bought a "production box" that's now for sale. M favors handmade boxes, owns three made by Anton Wolfe of Stevens Point.,
5. Dad bought concertina from a local man, mother didn't know about this. M is having the wooden handmade instrument restored, figures to use it on several numbers with his band. It's a little high pitched. A Lang concertina, German-made. Dad paid probably \$150, market value now around \$1,000.
6. Concertina could've originally been sold through Silberhorn or Patek.
7. "Production boxes" put together with beeswax. Sound pretty good, but demand high maintenance. "Plate boxes" of basswood, light for playing. M likes to stand when playing his concertina, fingering is different than if he was sitting.



8. M likes to mike his concertina rather than plug in, but does plug in when palying for outdoor concerts.
9. Watertown Dutchmen play "strictly Dutchman style music," no rock and roll. Get plenty of work.
10. M born in 1932, dad bought him the concertina around 1939-1940.
11. Traveled by car to Hustisford each Thursday for an hour instruction ech. Tough because they were farming. DeWitz a good teacher, but very strict; M didn't necessarily like this and took lessons for only a short time.
12. M plays tunes he wants band to do in the key he wants, then sends a tape to Marv Nissel in New Ulm who listens then writes out the music. Then Marv plays the tune in B flat and sends it back to M who then tells Marv what key he wants the tune in.
13. M decides what tunes to use in his public appearances by trying them out and seeing who dances.
14. Got to know Marv Nissel, the Wendinger Brothers, and others by going to polka festivals. M likes to hear what other people are playing. [A pump kicks on briefly, making loud and horrible noises.]
15. Nissel writes music for other bands besides running his own band and farming.
16. M still has sheet music purchased from DeWitz years ago, including Vitak-Elsnic material.. He refers to "Kristiana Waltz."
17. The Watertown Dutchmen will soon be making commercial tapes for sale and radio play.
18. Watertown Dutchmen personnel: Marian Lehman and Mel Knaack, concertinas; Merle Schwartz, drummer; Elroy Leisner, tuba. Help out players include Mike Kleinsteider of Jefferson on tuba and another tuba player from the Concord area.
19. Band's been going for five years. Lots of rehearsing first year when they



played about six jobs. Did 28-30 jobs last year (not including parades and picnics): weddings, anniversaries, benefits, snowmobile clubs, Christmas parties for plants. Reckons band has a good location between Madison and Milwaukee, Fond du Lac and Janesville.

20. M promotes the band himself with a cassette taped through his mixer board. Has business cards he hands out and displays.

21. Varies repertoire, can play four nights without repeat, but will play requests for popular tunes.

22. "St. George Polka" is big for them now, got the music from a North Dakota band, heard it at a polka festival. Elsnic's "Two Canary Polka" is big. "Happy Time Polka" learned from Minnesota. "Dance Little Bird" has been popular for three years. Plays schottisches, fox trots, polkas, waltzes.

23. "The Dutchman style of music is pretty much on the Minnesota style of music, maybe hankering toward the German part of, the edge between Germany and Bavaria. But the music originally came from Holland, really. But it was rewritten over in western Germany and part of it in Bavaria. And that's where you get your Dutchman style out of. But it got very popular here in Minnesota."

24. "It takes the tuba for the Dutchman style--it's the 'oompah' music."

25. M inspired to play this style because "it was something that was not played here." Recalls driving for miles to hear Six Fat Dutchmen or Syl Leibel or Whoopee John. Fritsche and Wagner's bands had more brass, changing the style some but "still had the oompah."

26. Concertina good in an oompah band because it can "cover" the sounds of saxophone or clarinet.

27. It's hard to take arrangements for other instruments and make them over for the concertina.



28. M's band wears blue vests with "Watertown Dutchmen" and first names of players. Reckons bands from Heidelberg wear these colored vests. He's only seen films of Germany, hopes to go sometime.

29. Enjoyed Lawrence Duchow, but still favored Minnesota bands. Bernie Roberts "kind of an intermediate band." More exciting, though, to hear out of town bands.

30. M would like someday to organize a polka festival, would bring in out of town bands for more variety.

31. Knew Karl Hartwich when he was 13 or 14 and could barely play the concertina. Now, with Karl and the Country Dutchmen, he still plays mostly by ear.

[TAPE ONE ENDS]

32. "Das Kufstein Lied" played on C concertina.

33. "Saddle Horse (Komicek) Polka," arranged by Al Nechinicky of Seattle. 2/5/77, for E flat concertina. [Nechinicky apparently had an enormous 130 key concertina so that he could accomodate all the keys that normally require several different concertinas.]

34. "Mariechen Waltz."

35. "Sauerkraut Polka," a Harold Loeffelmacher number.

36. "Waltz of the Angels," on B flat concertina.

[THE SESSION ENDS]