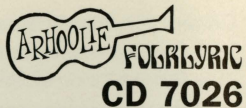


The Texas-Czech, Bohemian, & Moravian Bands

Historic Recordings 1928 - 1953



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(Baca's Czech Orchestra)

1. Drateník (Tinker Polka)
2. Lesní Zábava (Forest Party)
3. Pisnická Ceska (Song of Bohemia)
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(Bartered Bride March)
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(Young Widow Polka)

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(Memories of Youth) (waltz)
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(Around the Moon) (polka)
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12. Red Raven Polka

JOE PATEK'S ORCHESTRA:

13. Krasná Amerika (Beautiful America)
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26. Oneida Polka

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27. Corrido Rock



(Continued on page 2)

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TEXAS ★ CZECH BOHEMIAN-MORAVIAN BANDS



HISTORIC RECORDINGS 1929-1959

(Continued from back cover)

Cover Photo: Patek Family Orchestra (ca. late 1940s)

Left to right: trombone: Jerome Patek; trumpet: Jim Patek; bass horn: Charlie Patek; baritone horn: John Patek (father); trumpet: Ladie Patek; sax: Joe Patek. Photo courtesy Joe Patek

Original 78 rpm recordings from the collection of Chris Strachwitz.



Adolph Hofner's Band, ca. 1939/40, left to right: Bert Ferguson – piano; Leon Seago – fiddle; Johnny Rives – fiddle; Bash Hofner – steel; Buck Wheeler – bass; Adolph Hofner – guitar. Note: personnel on this CD: Adolph Hofner – guitar & vocals; Charlie Poss – piano; Emil "Bash" Hofner – steel; Charley Gregg – fiddle; Slim Wallace – fiddle; Eddie Duncan – bass; Dave Frazier – electric guitar; Jimmy Blankenship – drums.

Sound restoration by George Morrow of Echo Productions, using the No Noise System. Edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz. Cover by Wayne Pope.

Discography: 1) W402682-A, OK17359 (1929); 2) W402688, OK16390; 3) SA 2348; 4) W402687, OK17363; 5) SA2343-2; 6) SA2505-1 (1936); 7) SA 2498; 8) SA2347-2; 9) SA2351-1; 10) SA2340; 11) SA2344-1 (1935); 12) Martin 100; 13) Martin 103; 14) Martin 103; 15) Martin 106; 16) Martin 104; 17) Im1091 (XR-207); 18) (IF-21) Im1141; 19) (IF-22) Im1141; 20) (IF-75) Im1149; 21) (IF-48) Im1140; 22) (IF-74) Im1149; 23) HB160; 24) HB172; 25) HB153; 26) Mraz 1053; 27) TNT 5018.

THE TEXAS-CZECH, BOHEMIAN, & MORAVIAN BANDS

Historic Recordings 1929 - 1959

This is Texas music with that unmistakable southwest flavor and swing. It is also music from the old country — from central Europe, where the polkas, waltzes, marches, mazurkas, and other folk dances originated. This is energetic, joyful, sometimes sentimental, hybrid dance music, played by mostly amateur musicians, often members of family bands, who have kept many of these melodies and songs alive for the past hundred years or more. Over time, however, the musicians have incorporated new material and styles into this Texas-Czech music, keeping it up to date and thereby making it one of the most vibrant and popular dance traditions in the country.

The performances heard on this CD are the original recordings made between 1929, when the Baca Orchestra of Fayetteville, Texas, was asked to come over to San Antonio to make their first historic records, and the late 1950s, when the Joe Patek Orchestra and Adolf Hofner, among many others, continued to be popular dance hall

attractions throughout south central Texas. Today there are plenty of fine bands keeping this dance music going, and if you happen to visit Texas, check out some dances or festivals (all are listed in The Texas Polka News - Box 800183 - Houston, Tx. 77280). I hope these historic recordings will not only bring you enjoyment, but perhaps an appreciation for the beautiful sounds these musicians have passed on to future generations via these brief audio snap shots of their work.

The Czechs, Slovaks, Bohemians and Moravians who live in south central Texas are a Slavic people who came mainly from two provinces: Bohemia and Moravia in what is, as of this writing, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (formerly Czechoslovakia) in the center of Europe. Until 1918, this homeland was part of the Austrian empire for the previous 300 years.

The first organized Czech immigrant group arrived in Galveston, Texas, in 1852. They came to south-central Texas in response to glowing letters from Rev. Arnost

Bergmann who was then living in Cat Spring. The immigrants arrived at Galveston harbor and most went directly to the area around Cat Spring, near Sealy, in Austin County, where Germans had already settled. Fayetteville, just a bit further west, also first settled by German immigrants, has since become the center of Czech settlements in Texas.

Most of the new settlers left their homeland in the 19th century due to oppressive measures taken by the regime as the result of an unsuccessful revolt. Many Bohemians had left their homeland to avoid conscription into the Austrian army and the American Civil War, with its possibility of being drafted to serve either side, was worrisome and distasteful to them. When Moravia was absorbed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Moravians were forced to pledge allegiance to the Emperor. Rather than face prejudice and discrimination at the hands of the Austrians, many fled. Others came with the hope of making a better living. It was tough in those early days with most newcomers growing barely enough to survive. They all tried to raise at least one cash crop of cotton or corn in order to buy absolute

essentials. For years many Czechs worked as tenant farmers but eventually did well and obtained their own land or started businesses. The Czech ethnic community in Texas continued to grow and while there were only about 12,000 in 1920, by the mid-1930s their number had increased to around 300,000.

The **Baca** (pronounced Batcha) **Band** of Fayetteville is generally considered to be the first Czech orchestra in Texas. The family arrived in 1860 from Moravia. By 1882 the band, with Frank Baca the organizer, had about eleven members, almost all of whom played brass instruments. Until a few years ago members of the Baca family continued to be musical leaders in the area. Upon Frank Baca, Sr.'s death in 1907 his son John R. took on the leadership. When the band made its first recordings in 1929 the discs appeared in the company's Bohemian Catalog. Frank Jr. and Ludwig Baca played trumpets, Lad Baca – drums, Ray Baca – hammered dulcimer, Rudolph Baca – violin, plus several non-family members and, of course John R. Baca – leader and clarinet. Ray Baca's hammered dulcimer gave the band its unique old timey sound

and added the rural flavor.

Over the years the sound of the Baca bands and orchestras changed to accommodate new styles and trends in music. Besides the dance bands there was also a Baca concert band. On the outskirts of Fayetteville there used to be a bar operated by Kermit Baca and along the walls you could see a remarkable collection of photographs detailing the fascinating history of this family orchestra. I noticed one picture in particular which had the members posing in the manner of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and I was told that indeed they had a "jazz band" in the 1920s when that new style of music was gaining world-wide popularity.

During the 1930s radio became an important publicist for Czech music in Texas and the Baca band reportedly appeared as early as 1926 on Houston's KPRC and by the 1930s one or the other of the Baca bands was heard on the radio from Houston to San Angelo. Two selections recorded in the early 1950s, (late in the career of John R. Baca who died at age 60 in 1953), *Barbara Polka* and *Circling Pigeons Waltz*, have a sound that harks back to an earlier

era. In the 1970s, Gil Baca, son of Ray Baca, became the musical leader of the family and took his band to the Smithsonian Festival in Washington, D.C. and in 1972 they made a tour of Czechoslovakia.

Another Czech band which did well because of radio, was **Adolf and his Bohemians**. The leader's name was Adolf Pavlas and the sound of his Bohemians was more genteel in contrast to the Baca bands or the later Patek and Hofner bands. Universal Mills of Fort Worth wanted to sell more flour and figured what Bob Wills and the Light Crust Doughboys could do for reaching the Anglo audiences, a good Bohemian band could do for getting to the Czech population. A contest on several radio stations declared a group under Pavlas' leadership the winner and in 1935 Adolph and the Gold Chain Bohemians began a regular broadcast.

Another important and historic band, and one of my personal favorites, was the **Joe Patek Orchestra**. This family band dates back to 1895 when Joe Patek's father John Patek arrived from Czechoslovakia. John Patek was already a musician in the old country and upon his arrival he organized

the Patek Orchestra. He soon married and over the years most of his numerous sons played in the band. Today Shiner, Texas, is still known for two things: Shiner Beer and Joe Patek's Orchestra! The Patek brothers not only kept up the old musical traditions but have also done well as farmers and businessmen. A grocery store, several meat markets, a drug store, a restaurant, and several other enterprises bear the Patek name, run in recent years mainly by third and fourth generation American-born Pateks.

The first records made by Joe Patek and his Bohemian Orchestra in San Antonio in the mid-1930s for the Decca label, did not turn out well because, according to Joe Patek, the recording director rushed them. Shortly after World War II when small regional labels sprang up all over the country, Joe Patek's recording career began in earnest. By this time it was a smaller group with piano and trap drums geared to supplying music in beer halls and at dances rather than playing formal concerts in the town square. The first records were made by the Martin label in San Antonio who recorded not only German and Bohemian bands but

also the fine Mexican-American accordionist Santiago Jimenez. These two cultures have long lived side by side in Texas and Mexican-American musicians have adapted many Czech/Bohemian tunes into their repertoire while most Czech bands have learned popular Mexican melodies. The final tune on this CD is a wonderful example of the cross fertilization and borrowing of musical ideas which has been an ongoing process over the years. Joe Patek's orchestra continued to be a popular institution until his death at age 80 on October 24, 1987.

Adolph Hofner became perhaps the best known singer and musician of Texas-Czech background. From childhood on he enjoyed American popular and western music and decided to make his living from music. Adolph, with his guitar and brother Emil, (known as "Bash" due to his shyness), and his steel guitar, joined Jimmie Revard's western swing band in 1936 and started recording for Bluebird with that group. Three years later the Hofner brothers went out alone and began their own recording career. Adolph's smooth voice soon gained him a following as country music's Bing

Crosby. His biggest successes were with western songs sung in English. After World War II, however, Adolph returned to his first language, Czech, singing and recording many of the traditional staples heard on this collection, but in the by-then more widely favored Country & Western style heard throughout the southwest. As Adolph put it so well himself: "I was about the first guy to put a country music sound to German and Czech music and to this day it follows me." I have included two versions of the very popular *Shiner Song* which is basically the old ethnic tune *Farewell to Prague* but with Shiner, Texas as the main focus!

The **Benny Brosh Band**, like Adolph Hofner's more recent groups, also shows a lot of Country & Western influence with a strong fiddle lead. **Ray Krenek's** orchestra is believed to have started towards the end of the last century and his sound is certainly in the older tradition with Ray leading on hammered dulcimer but also playing reeds and violin. The band includes many Kreneks as well as a few neighbors from Wallis, Texas.

Old time polka music and waltzes are still very popular throughout south and central Texas where the Czech language is

also still heard in towns like Hallettsville, La Grange, Moulton, West, and of course Fayetteville, to name a few. Visitors can tune in the La Grange radio station when they pass through and more than likely catch bandleader Lee Roy Matocha hosting one of his many Czech programs which he tapes at his home in Fayetteville and then sends out to many stations in the area for delayed broadcast. **Bill Mraz's** ballroom in Houston used to feature polka bands every weekend and you can hear these Czech bands at dance halls and festivals throughout the region. Like all folk traditions, the music is constantly changing and evolving and will never sound quite the same again as it did on these records from the past. Most of the bands active today have made recordings and usually sell them where they perform. I hope you enjoy these examples of a vital musical tradition which continues today in spite of mass media's constant attempt to feed us all the same mush.

(Chris Strachwitz - 1993)

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