

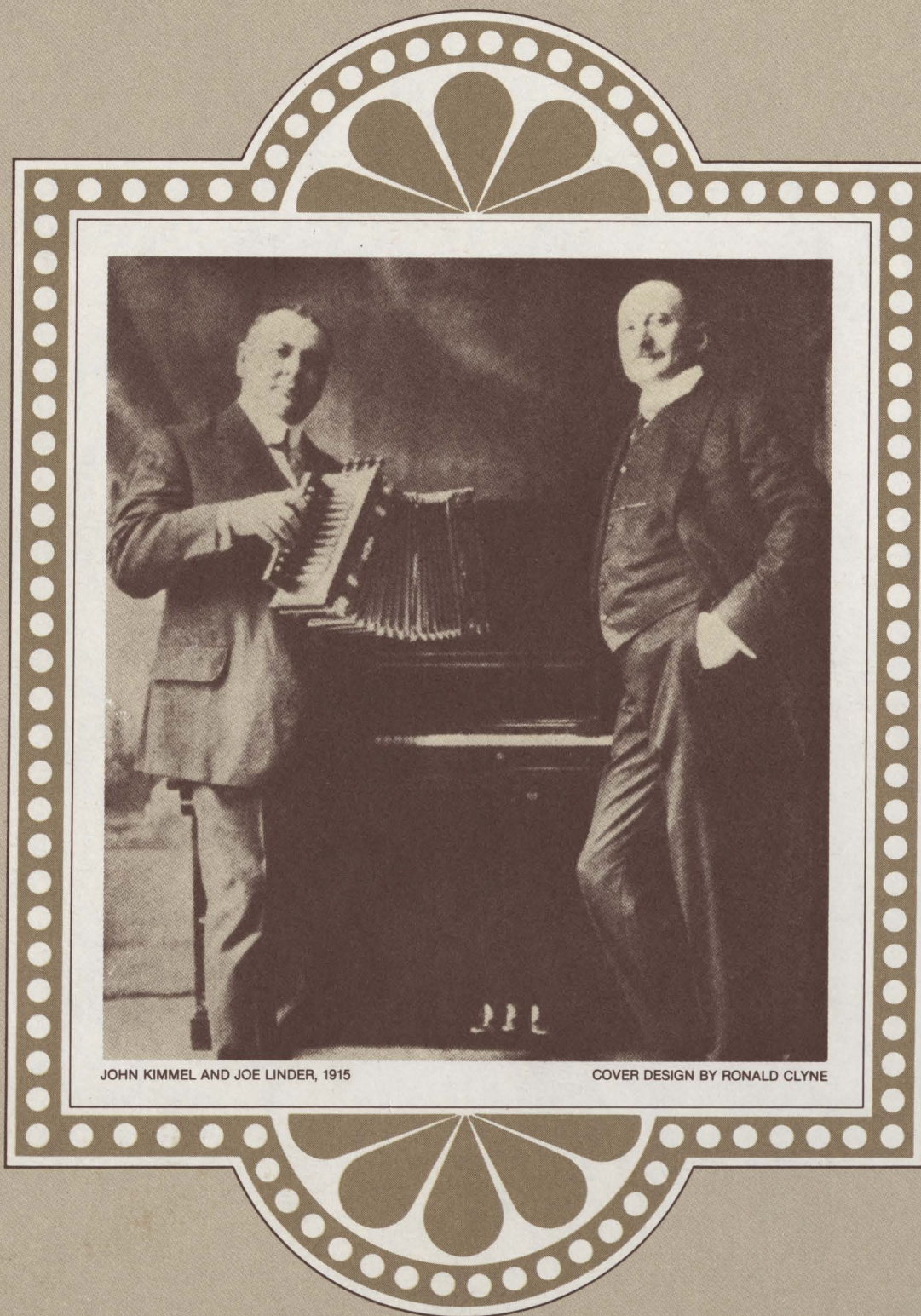
FOLKWAYS RF 112

JOHN KIMMEL

Virtuoso of the Irish Accordion

ORIGINAL RECORDINGS 1906-1928

SELECTED BY GABRIEL LABBE AND PRODUCED BY RICHARD CARLIN



JOHN KIMMEL AND JOE LINDER, 1915

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RF 112

Side One

- 1) Minor March (June 1908)
- 2) Medley of Straight Jigs (December 1907)
- 3) Fitzmaurice Polka (June 1928)
- 4) Medley of German Waltzes (Nov. 1908)
- 5) American Cakewalk (Comp. J. Kimmel; July 1908)
- 6) Medley of Irish Jigs (September 1907)
- 7) "Oh Gee!"—Medley of Irish Reels (June 1919)

Side Two

- 1) Indian Intermezzo (November 1908)
- 2) New Tipperary March (May 1910)
- 3) The Black Bird—Set Dance (October 1919)
- 4) Geese in the Bog Medley—Irish Jigs (January 1917)
- 5) Medley of Popular Reels (April 1908)
- 6) The Homeward March (January 1920)
- 7) International Echoes (Comp. Joe Linder; November, 1916)

Selected by Gabriel Labbe
Annotated by Gabriel Labbe and Richard Carlin
Produced by Richard Carlin

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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JOHN KIMMEL

Virtuoso of the Irish Accordion

John Kimmel was one of the greatest performers on the Irish diatonic button accordion who ever recorded. Although of German extract, he mastered the complex style of Irish ornamentation. His medleys of jigs and reels were great favorites among the Irish audience in America, where he frequently performed on the Vaudeville circuit. This album features some of his rarest and earliest recordings and makes available a wide cross-section of his repertory, including novelty pieces, German popular pieces, American and Irish tunes.

John Kimmel's Life

John Kimmel was born in Brooklyn on December 13, 1866 to German immigrant parents. At what age did he start playing? Who was his teacher? We may never know the answers to these questions. What we do know from listening to his recordings is that he had a gift that no one can equal.

We know little of Kimmel's life story, although we do know that he was a saloon keeper who also performed in the early years of vaudeville. Kimmel played with the "Elite Musical Four," a group consisting of himself, Joe Linder, the pianist who was to be his accompanist on almost all of his classic recordings, and two other musicians. In 1906, Kimmel opened a bar in a popular section of Brooklyn. In a corner of the room he built a stage where he performed with his vaudeville band short skits and popular musical numbers. Kimmel played piano, cornet, xylophone and saxophone at one time or another in this group, although his true love was the accordion. Patrick F. Stedman, a Brooklynite who knew Kimmel and the quartet, recalls that they used to rehearse "four or five nights a week in an undertaking establishment on Court street...They practiced their singing and playing their skits."

Through his career as a saloon owner, Kimmel performed and also hired other vaudeville performers, including Joe Schenk, Gus Van and a young Brooklynite named Mae West. His last bar, named "The Accordion," was located in Queens, but was not terribly successful. Prohibition had come and Kimmel refused to break the law and sell alcoholic beverages.

Kimmel played the accordion as background music for silent films. His recording career ran from the earliest days of cylinder recording through the introduction of electric recording techniques, although his greatest recordings were made between 1908 - 1918. He can also be heard on several novelty records, including possibly a record by the comic duo of Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlau called "My Gal Irene," which features accordion interludes that were probably played by Kimmel, a comic record by Steve Porter called "Thim Were the Happy Days," and a Victor demonstration record released to dealers called "The Irresistible Accordion."

Kimmel died of pneumonia at the King's County hospital in Brooklyn on September 18, 1942. He was 75 years old. His death certificate gave his occupation as "musician."

Kimmel's Recording Career

John Kimmel's first record was made in 1903; it was a popular song called "Bedelia" and was released by the Zon-o-phone company (No. 5906). It appeared on both seven and nine inch discs. Following this first recording, Kimmel recorded an "Irish Jigs and Reels Medley" (no. 6006), and three other nine inch records "Irish Reel Medley" (No. 6047), "American Polka" (No. 6060) and "Straight Jig Medley" (No. 6071). In 1905, at the age of thirty-nine, Kimmel recorded two ten inch records for Zon-o-phone: "American clog" (No. 212) and "Yankee Doodle Dandy" (No. 234; actually George M. Cohan's "Yankee Doodle Boy," not the popular revolutionary war song). He recorded ten or so records in all for this company.

On these early records and on all of his records until his very last recordings, Kimmel was expertly accompanied on the piano by Joe Linder. Linder was born in Brooklyn on January 23, 1870 and died in 1943. He was also apparently of German extract. Unlike many other recording artists who were plagued with unsympathetic and untalented accompanists, Kimmel was fortunate to be recording with a pianist who knew his repertory, had a good knowledge of both Irish and novelty music and apparently also helped with arranging and even composing some of Kimmel's popular records.

Kimmel began recording with Edison in May, 1906 and continued with the firm until they closed in 1929. He also recorded for Columbia, Victor, and countless smaller firms including Emerson, Silvertone, Perfect, Velvet Tone, and Regal. Kimmel recorded forty cylinders and 78 rpm records for Columbia and Edison, whereas his production was limited to discs at Victor.

The most popular of his Edison recordings were "The Kimmel March," "The Homeward March," "Oh Gee!," and "Medley of Irish Reels."

At Victor, his "Irish Boy March" (same as "Kimmel March"), "Minor March" and "American Polka" were the most successful, and remained in the catalogue for years. His medley of "The Geese in the Bog" backed with "Stack of Barley," recorded in January, 1917, was in the catalogue as late as 1933!

In the early Edison catalogues, Kimmel's name was misspelled as "Kimmble." Also, many of his compositions and arrangements were credited to a certain "Edgar De Veau," probably a pseudonym for Kimmel himself. On some records, Joe Linder is given line credit as arranger. Undoubtedly, the two discussed their arrangements together.

Kimmel's last recordings were made in 1929 for Edison, and were released as "Edison Diamond Discs" in the early months of 1929. Unfortunately, sales of these records had dropped tremendously; the Edison process of making records was outmoded by more modern grooved records. For this reason, these last recordings are among the most difficult to find.

Kimmel's Style

Philippe Bruneau, the talented French Canadian accordion player, says this of Kimmel's style:

His playing is very difficult to imitate. Anyone who would want to play like Kimmel would have to devote himself to 20 or 30 years of practice. This person would also have to have a natural musical capability, otherwise he might as well give up at the start.

Generally, Kimmel used a diatonic accordion, with a 10-button keyboard in the key of "D." He probably had either a "Sterling" or "Monarch" accordion (imported from Germany). These accordions are sometimes called "melodians" today. They are distinguished by four sets of steel reeds that is to say four registers: a piccolo, a bass and two mediums for the right hand, and two basses, "D" when the bellows are pushed, and "A" when they are pulled open. There is also a button for air release which serves to control the bellows.

For any accordion player who would like to learn Kimmel's style, it is inconceivable to use less than three fingers on the right hand. Kimmel loved to play in octaves, which requires the use of four fingers. Many of the difficult passages in his pieces demand the use of four fingers. Kimmel found a personal method to control the bellows of the accordion by putting very little pressure on them with his left hand, allowing his right hand to exert most of the force. This is how he achieved the clarity and brilliance of his sound.

Kimmel made only limited use of his bass notes. He also sought to go beyond the limitations of the "D" scale of his accordion, exploring such diverse keys as "G," "Em," "A," "Bm," and "F#m."

His style can be summed up by this amusing excerpt from the Edison musical magazine Along Broadway published in 1920:

The fellow who writes things for the Encyclopedia Britannica said in describing the accordion that "this, the smallest of the organ family, in the hands of a skillful performer is not entirely without artistic beauty." It is a safe wager that he had never heard John J. Kimmel turn her loose. If he had, he probably would have said, "My word, but the accordion is a humdinger!" ...Mr. Kimmel has put the accordion in the class of real musical instruments...you are reminded of a combination that might result from a Scotch bagpipe and a jazz band, and the rhythm is so compelling that you feel like shouting "swing your partner." ...there are occasional suggestions of tones of a church organ swelling out in all their beauty, coupled with the rhythm and "pep" of a military band.

Kimmel's Repertory

Kimmel's repertory, as it is reflected on his recordings, is about equally divided between Irish traditional dance music and more recent compositions. Kimmel was equally at home playing a traditional Irish set dance tune (like "The Blackbird") or a novelty march of his own composition; he also recorded German waltzes, American pop tunes, patriotic and well known songs, and even a recreation of Native American Indian music. In all this music, Kimmel's artistry and talent shine forth.

Kimmel's performances can be classified into three categories:

1. The pieces that are most difficult from the point of view of technique are, "Cuckoo's Nest," "Bonnie Kate," "Oh Gee!," "American Cakewalk," "Hornpipe Medley."
2. Those that reflect his mastery of the accordion are: "Indian Intermezzo," "Medley of German Waltzes," "Irish boy March," "The Homeward March."
3. The pieces that reveal his sensitivity as an interpreter include: "International Echoes," "Buck Dance Medley," "Minor March," "Popular Straight Jigs," "Schottische Medley," "Stack of Barley Medley."

The Music

1. Minor March - The title of this one was misspelled by Edison as "Miner March." Kimmel also recorded it for Victor. Listen for Kimmel's characteristic fast scale runs (which give the effect of a violinist's "slur" or slide into a note) and his incredibly fast ornaments. As always, the piano accompaniment is wonderful.
2. Medley of Straight Jigs - Listen here for the variety Kimmel gets, between legato and staccato, and also the accent he gives to the chords as opposed to his light touch on the ornaments and scale runs. The medley ends with a wonderfully humorous adaptation of Swanee River (introduced in the B-music) with flying arpeggios and trills.
3. Fitzmaurice Polka - This is one of Kimmel's last recordings, and he is accompanied on the guitar by Andy Fiedler. Fiedler is fairly adept at his instrument, and Kimmel keeps things moving along from tune to tune.
4. German Waltzes - Kimmel stretches out on some melodies from his own national background. Again the embellishments and style are pure Kimmel; no one else plays this instrument in this way.
5. American Cakewalk - Kimmel's own composition is like many other nineteenth century "folk style" pieces. First, he plays it like a dance tune, playing just an "A" and "B" part. Characteristically, the first part is in a minor mode, and the second has a more major sound. The second time through, Kimmel plays a dramatic bridge after the "B" part that leads to a grand final theme. The form is typical of a composed march or rag; indeed there are echoes of Sousa and the minstrel show composers, such as Edwin Christie.
6. Irish Jigs - This medley shows Kimmel's skill playing traditional tunes. Note the rolling ornaments and the clear demarcation of phrases. Linder really has to race along to keep up with the accordian.
7. Oh Gee! Reels - Amazing!

Side Two

- Indian Intermezzo - A charming novelty piece, vaguely based on American Indian sounding themes.
- New Tipperary March
2. New Tipperary March - This very early recording doesn't always go true to speed, but still is worth having for its (short) example of Kimmel's virtuosity.
 3. The Blackbird - A traditional Irish set dance tune played at a speed appropriate for Irish dancing. Kimmel certainly must have known Irish musicians (or played

for dancing) to give such a sympathetic reading. The second tune is "The Rights of Man" Hornpipe and both can be found in O'Neill's classic Dance Music of Ireland.

4. Geese in the Bog Medley - One of Kimmel's most popular recordings, it consists of Geese in the Bog, Colairne, and The Trip to the Cottage, according to the record label. The Victor promotional material said of this performance:

The jigs in the present medley are lively enough, in the words of Pope, to "make the soul dance upon a jig to heaven."

Though released in 1917, it remained in print until 1933 and is very easy to find in used record shops even today.

5. Medley of Popular Reels - More fast reel playing from Kimmel.
6. The Homeward March - Another popular sounding number
7. International Echoes - This is credited to Jbe Linder in the record catalogues. It is a wonderful contrivance made up of short excerpts from dozens of popular melodies. Listen for "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "La Marseillaise," "Blue Bells of Scotland," "Dixie," and a rousing final on "Auld Lang Syne" where Linder lets loose. A perfect ending for the album.

These notes are based on research by Gabriel Labbe and Jim Walsh. See Walsh's article in the February, 1958 issue of Hobbies for more on Kimmel. Special thanks to Philippe Bruneau for his priceless collaboration. Gabriel Labbe, Montreal, Janvier, 1980
Richard Carlin, Princeton, March, 1980.

John J. Kimmel

le maître du petit accordéon diatonique.

John Kimmel est né à Brooklyn le 13 décembre 1866, de parents immigrés d'Allemagne. De tous les interprètes du petit accordéon diatonique, dix boutons, Kimmel a été et demeure le maître. A quel âge a-t-il commencé à jouer? Qui fut son professeur? Deux questions qui demeurent sans réponse. Nous n'avons pu remonter aussi loin dans nos recherches. Ce que nous constatons en l'écoutant c'est qu'il a un don que personne ne saurait égalé même actuellement.

Nous relaterons donc quelques brèves de sa vie privée ainsi que sa carrière à partir de 1903, soit lorsqu'il enregistre son premier disque: no: 5906 "Bedelia" publié en deux copies l'une sur un disque sept pouces et l'autre sur un neuf pouces. Il a comme accompagnateur Joe Linder. Celui-ci su apporter le support et la beauté à la musique de Kimmel.

En 1906, John Kimmel, ouvre un saloon (il eût différents saloons en outre l'un d'eux s'appelle l'Accordéon) dans un quartier populaire de Brooklyn. Dans un coin de son saloon il installe une scène où il exécute avec sa troupe du vaudeville et des saynètes musicales dans lesquelles il joue de différents instruments tels: piano, cornet, xylophone et saxophone. Pendant les intermèdes il s'en donne à coeur joie sur son accordéon. John, grand et gros homme que l'on dit pourtant timide est un très respectable tenancier. Il ne vend pas d'alcool car à cette époque c'est la prohibition. Il est marié, son épouse se nomme "Margareth". Il n'ont pas d'enfants mais ils adoptent une petite fille de neuf ans "Madeleine".

Kimmel participe à quelques films muets en jouant de l'accordéon ce qui sert de musique de fond. Le duo comique par Arthur Collins et Byron O. Harlan qui a pour titre: "My Gal Irene", a des intermèdes d'accordéon que l'on présume être de John Kimmel ainsi que la disquette comprenant les sketches comiques de Steve Porter ayant pour titre: "Thin Were the Happy Days".

John J. Kimmel est décédé des suites d'une pneumonie à l'hôpital King County de Brooklyn le 18 septembre 1942 à l'âge de 75 ans.

LES DISQUES DE KIMMEL.

Kimmel enregistre plusieurs disques de musique irlandaise. Tous ces disques sont aujourd'hui des pièces de collection.

En 1903, après avoir enregistré: "Bedelia", sur étiquette Zon-o-phone, il continue avec le no: 6006 "Irish Jigs" et "Reel Medley" suivit de trois disques neuf pouces: no: 6047 "Irish Reel Medley", 6060: "American Polka" et 6071: "Straight Jif Medley". En 1905, il fait avec Zon-o-phone deux disques dix pouces: no: 212 "American Clog" et le 234: "Yankee Doodle Dandy". Il a alors trente-neuf ans. Il enregistre environ une dizaine de disques pour cette compagnie.

Pour Edison et Columbia, il enregistre cylindre (40) et disques tandis qu'il n'enregistre que des 78 tours chez Victor. Il fit aussi quelques enregistrements pour des compagnies moins connues telles que: Emerson, Silvertone, Perfect, Velvet Tone et Regal.

Chez Edison les disques qui obtiennent le plus haut taux de vente sont: "The Kimmel March", "The Homeward March", "Oh Gee", "Medley of Irish Reels".

Pour Victor: "Irish boy March", "Minor March", "American Polka" ont connu des ventes à tout casser et ce, pendant plusieurs années. Voici ce qu'un journaliste écrit au sujet de "Medley of Irish Jigs" dans le petit catalogue de disques Victor de septembre 1907:

"Pour un grand nombre de personnes dans le monde il n'y a pas de musique comme celle de l'accordéon. Pour le bénéfice aussi bien que pour le plaisir de ceux qui aiment un beau disque de gigue nous offrons un des plus beaux disques qu'il soit possible de faire sur cet instrument. Il est très fortement et très splendidement joué, l'exécution

de M. Kimmel est simplement surprenant".

Au sujet de: "American Cakewalk", publié en juillet 1908 voici ce qui est écrit dans la publicité:

"Un bruyant et beau disque de ce populaire instrument qui dans les mains de Kimmel est capable de devenir presque un orchestre en entier!"

Sur les cylindres enregistrés par Kimmel on voit d'inscrit arrangements et musique par Edgar de Veau que l'on suppose être Kimmel. D'ailleurs il est fait mention dans quelques petits catalogues que Kimmel écrit de la musique et fait ses arrangements. Re: catalogue Edison Blue Amberol records, juillet 1907. Sur les cylindres il est parfois écrit Kimmble au lieu de Kimmel.

Le 3 janvier 1929, Kimmel enregistre chez Edison son dernier disque le no: 52499: "Floggan Reel", "The Trip to the Cottage", - "Irish Jigs". Il était accompagné à la guitare par Andrew Fiedler. Kimmel avait alors 62 ans. Les ventes de disques Edison ayant beaucoup diminuées, c'est la raison pour laquelle les derniers disques de Kimmel sur cette étiquette sont très difficiles à trouver.

Tous les disques que Kimmel enregistre peu importe la compagnie connaissent une énorme popularité et la plupart atteignent un chiffre de vente record.

Son REPERTOIRE

La variété du répertoire de Kimmel nous prouve qu'il n'a pas dans son interprétation de faiblesse apparente. Que ce soit marche, gigue,

valse ou reels, il y met une touche personnelle qui démontre son grand talent. La musique irlandaise aussi bien que populaire jouée à la façon de Kimmel ne peut laisser personne indifférent. Pour donner une idée de sa manière de jouer nous classifions ici quelques mélodies.

1. Les pièces les plus exigeantes du point de vue technique sont: "Cuckoo's Nest", "Bonnie Kate", "Medley of reels", "Oh Gee", "Medley of Irish Reels", "American Cakewalk", "Medley Hornpipe".
2. Pour la maîtrise de son accordéon: "Indian Intermezzo", "Medley of Clog", "Medley of Germain Waltzes", "Irish boy March", "The Homeward March", "Allerdeen March".
3. Les pièces où il atteint une grande finesse d'interprétation: "International Echoes", "Buck Dance Medley", "Minor March", "Popular Straight Jigs", "Medley of Straight jigs", "Stack of Barley Medley", "Schottische Medley".

LA TECHNIQUE DE KIMMEL

"Son jeu est très difficile à imiter. Celui qui veut un jour jouer à la façon de Kimmel doit prévoir de vingt à trente ans de pratique. Cette personne doit en plus avoir un talent musical naturel sinon elle devra laisser tomber". Ces paroles sont de Philippe Bruneau merveilleux accordéoniste folklorique du Québec et fervent admirateur de John J. Kimmel.

Il est très difficile ici d'analyser la technique de Kimmel. Doué d'un talent naturel et d'un doigté agile et régulier, il a toujours eu pour le seconder un pianiste hors pair en la personne de Joe Linder. Le talent de l'accompagnateur est aussi évident que celui de l'interprète sans cela comment auraient-ils pu former un tel duo!

91029

En général Kimmel se sert d'un accordéon diatonique, une rangée (dix boutons) de tonalité D. L'accordage: un son mouillé. Sans doute joue-t-il sur un accordéon "Sterling" ou "Monarch" (importé de l'Allemagne) à quatre séries d'anches en acier c'est-à-dire quatre registres: un piccolo, une basse, deux médiums pour la main droite et de deux basses soit: D en poussant et A en tirant ainsi qu'un bouton pour l'air servant à contrôler le soufflet. Ajoutons à cela la force des doigts de la main droite qui martèlent le clavier à la manière d'autant de marteaux mécaniques.

Pour tout accordéoniste qui veut apprendre le style de Kimmel, il est inconcevable de ne se servir que de trois doigts. Kimmel aime jouer en octave, pour cela les quatre doigts sont nécessaires. D'ailleurs plusieurs passages de ses morceaux demandent l'utilisation de quatre doigts. En plus de la force des doigts il faut ajouter que Kimmel a trouvé une façon personnelle de manier le soufflet de son accordéon en y mettant très peu de pression avec sa main gauche. De là, la douceur de son jeu

clair et brillant et les effets que l'on peut entendre dans certaines de ses mélodies. Quant à ses bases il ne doit pas beaucoup s'en servir si on se fit à ses enregistrements. La tonalité en D de son accordéon étant d'utilisation assez restreinte il a quand même su l'exploiter au maximum en jouant des pièces de tonalité: G, E^m, B^m, A, F^m.

Que peut-on ajouter de plus sur cet accordéoniste sinon qu'en écoutant ce microsillon vous assisterez à un concert de musique traditionnelle donné par un grand maître.

Gabriel Labbé,
30 janvier 1980

Sincère remerciement à Philippe Bruneau pour sa précieuse collaboration, et aussi à M. Jim Walsh de Vinton, en Virginie.

FOLKWAYS Records

AND SERVICE CORP., 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C. 10023
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 1/3 RPM

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JOHN KIMMEL:
VIRTUOSO OF THE IRISH ACCORDION
Original Recordings 1906 - 1928

SIDE ONE

RF 112 A

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3. Fitzmaurice Polka (June 1928)
4. Medley of German Waltzes (Nov. 1908)
5. American Cakewalk (Comp. J. Kimmel; July 1908)
6. Medley of Irish Jigs (September 1907)
7. "Oh Gee!" — Medley of Irish Reels (June 1919)

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JOHN KIMMEL:
VIRTUOSO OF THE IRISH ACCORDION
Original Recordings 1906 - 1928

SIDE TWO

RF 112 B

1. Indian Intermezzo (November 1908)
2. New Tipperary March (May 1910)
3. The Black Bird — Set Dance (October 1919)
4. Geese in the Bog Medley — Irish Jigs
(January 1917)
5. Medley of Popular Reels (April 1908)
6. The Homeward March (January 1920)
7. International Echoes (Comp. Joe Linder;
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