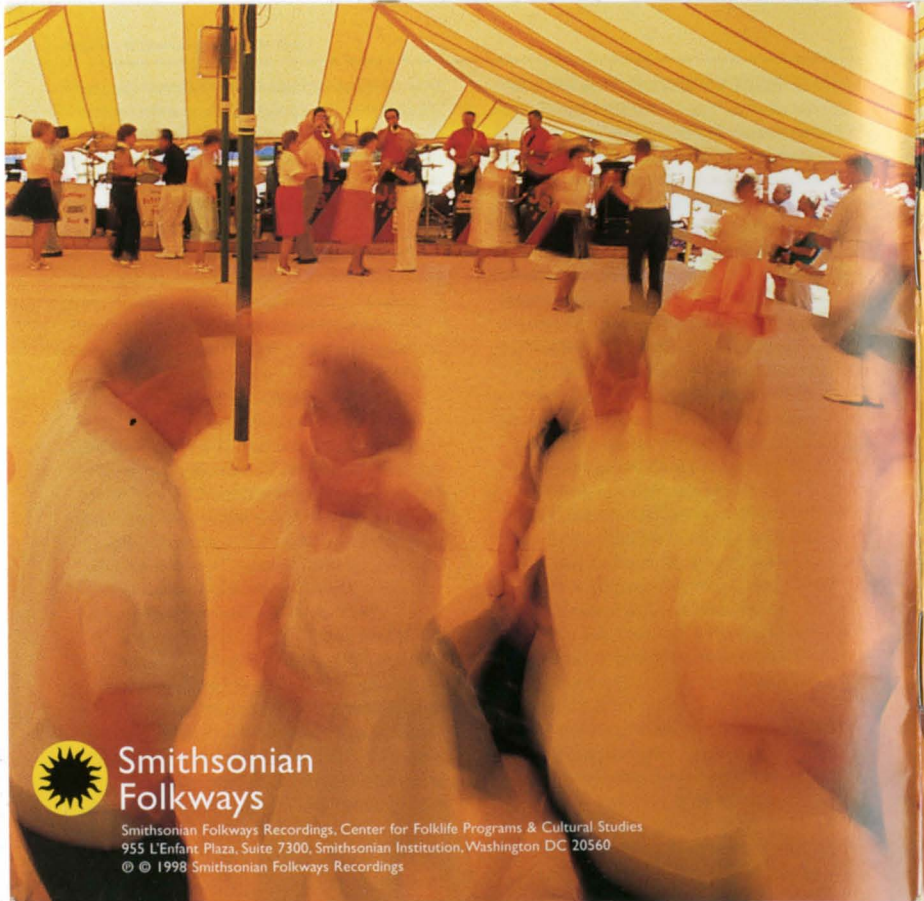

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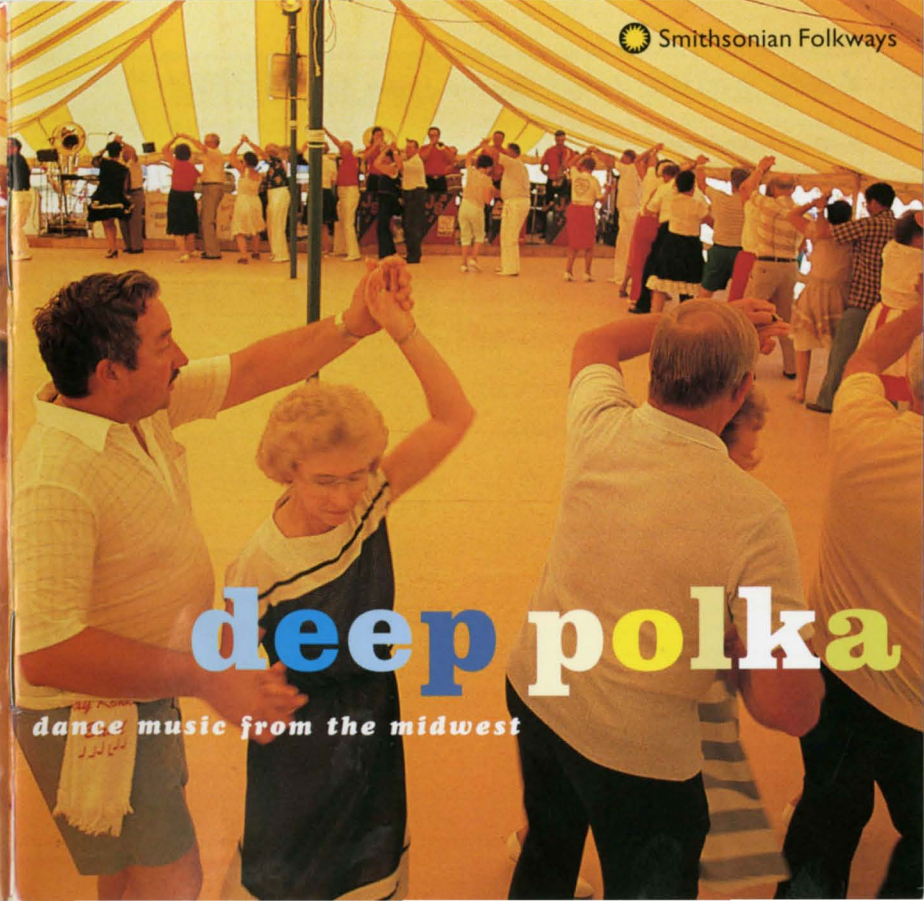

deep polka

dance music from the midwest

deep polka *dance music from the midwest*

Karl and the Country Dutchmen

1. Minnesota Polka 2:25
2. Karl's Bad Schottische 2:01
3. Fleeting Memories Waltz 2:21
4. Gary's Polka 2:13

The Norskedalen Trio

5. Remmem Valsen 2:39
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Vatra

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CURATOR'S FOREWORD

In parts of the United States, polka music may seem distant and exotic; but in large sections of the Upper Midwest the polka and related European-derived dances are an important and enduring tradition that brings tens of thousands of people together to dance almost every weekend.

The polka is more danced than studied, and recordings of it are more often self-produced by the bands than distributed through popular music industry channels. The tracks on this collection were selected from recordings the seven bands had released previously. This CD is part of the celebration of the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial, which included a program at the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington D.C. Six of the seven bands performed in that program.

The title of this recording, "Deep Polka" refers to the depth of the importance of this music in the Upper Midwest, to the deep musical roots tapped by the performances on this disc, and also to music as "deep play" in the sense that it is highly significant to its participants (Geertz 1971). Above all, though, this is dance music. Don't just sit down and listen to it—tap your feet, then get up and dance to it. That's what the musicians had in mind, and that is the power of the music itself. If you haven't done so already, you might go later to a live performance, dance under a tent, and become a deep fan yourself.

Anthony Seeger, Curator and Director
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Reference: Gertz, Clifford. 1971. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In Clifford Gertz, ed. *Myth, Symbol, and Culture*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

DEEP POLKA: DANCE MUSIC FROM THE MIDWEST

Richard March

From Europe to Mid-America

Nineteenth-century European immigrants to the Midwest arrived with polkas ringing in their ears. The polka, a lively couple's dance in 2/4 time, had emerged from its folk roots to become a European popular dance craze in the 1840s. In elite Paris salons and in humble village taverns, polka dancers flaunted their defiance of convention, eschewing older staid dance forms, the minuets and quadrilles, for this raucous and, for the times, scandalous new dance.

The nineteenth century was a period of revolution and social upheaval in Europe. Polka was symptomatic of the same historical currents of social unrest that launched thousands of European villagers on their uncertain and perilous migration to the American Midwest. They became farmers, miners, lumberjacks, factory workers, and entrepreneurs in the new land, but they continued to enjoy the music and dance traditions of their old homelands, passing them on to American-born generations.

The population of the northern Midwestern states was definitively shaped by this wave of migration from central and northern Europe. Wisconsin, a state in the heart of the Upper Midwest, has a population more than 90% European-American—largely from central and northern Europe. According to U.S. Census figures, more than 50% of the state's residents indicated German or part German as their ethnic origin. Scandinavians and Slavs also comprise substantial percentages of the population.

Consistent with the heritage of its inhabitants, the soundscape of traditional music in Wisconsin and neighboring states reflects a German-Slavic-Scandinavian synthesis and differs considerably from that of other American regions. Relatively speaking, there is little English- or African-American population in the region. As a result, music forms representing the Anglo-Afro syntheses, such as jazz, bluegrass, or the blues did not become influential in the Upper Midwest until they were conveyed by the advent of the phonograph and the radio in the 1920s. By this time the European-based music styles were already well established in the region. Seventy years later, in the 1990s, the Midwest's unique Euro-American traditional musics born in the nineteenth century live on.

The Instruments

The emergence of the polka coincided with the booming popularity of brass bands in central Europe and in America. Many midwestern lips met the mouthpieces of trumpets, clarinets and tubas to play marches, waltzes, and polkas by popular band composers like John Philip Sousa and Frantisek Kmoch. Immigrant music instructors and band leaders, especially Germans and Czechs, had a tremendous influence. Town bands became an object of civic pride in Midwestern communities. Talent pools of wind instrument players were created in even the smallest rural communities.

The nineteenth century also saw the invention of a variety of squeezeboxes—accordions and concertinas. Innovative tinkerers in France, England, and Germany developed a new family of instruments based on the principles of the *sheng*, a Chinese free reed instrument, but using the levers and springs.

Using mechanical principles of the Machine Age, the squeezebox was a nineteenth-century technological innovation much like the programmable keyboard, whose electonic and digital technology has automated musical performance in the late twentieth century. A single accordion or concertina player could replace a small ensemble, producing melodies and harmonies on the right hand while the left hand provided rhythmic chords and bass notes. The prized possession in many an immigrant's pack was a button accordion or concertina, and that musician undoubtedly played a lot of polkas, waltzes, and schottisches.

The epicenter of the squeezebox and brass-band earthquake was in central Europe. On its northern and southern fringes, other instrumental traditions were persisting or developing in other directions. In western Scandinavia, at the time of the big wave of migration to America, the fiddle remained the main folk instrument.In Midwestern Norwegian- and Swedish-American communities, the fiddler or spelman vies for the limelight with the accordionist. The shared common interest in the violin has attracted Scandinavian Midwestern fiddlers to the old-time fiddle contest scene where they gather with Anglo-Celtic fiddlers from the South and North and French fiddlers from Canada to play a repertoire that blends their Scandinavian *valsen*, schottisches, and polkas with plenty of American sentimental tunes, two-steps, and hoe-downs.

Nineteenth-century Croatians and Serbs from the Austro-Hungarian Empire had an instrumental revolution afoot. As part of a South Slavic movement for cultural affirmation, a simple village lute, the tamburitza, was refined and standardized for orchestral use. Slavic peasants whisked these improved instruments out the back door of the concert hall and played them in small tamburitza combos in the village tavern. Mass emigration from these parts to America occurred around the end of the last century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, tamburitza combos that played polkas, waltzes, and *kolo* line dances were formed in midwestern mining and industrial towns where these later immigrants settled.

Like the South Slavs who emigrated in their greatest numbers from the 1890s to World War

I, the Finns were latecomers to the Upper Midwest ethnic mix. Finnish villagers had warmly embraced the accordion by the time they migrated to the Lake Superior region to mine metals, cut timber, and farm the cut-over land. Finnish-American accordionists like the legendary Viola Turpeinen played a unique repertoire of polkas, waltzes, and schottisches that stylistically blends indigenous Finnish music with musical influences from Finland's neighbors and sometime rulers, Russia and Sweden.

American Polka Styles

Upon its arrival in the Midwest, the polka became a regional American folk tradition, much as the people who brought it over became American midwesterners. At rural house parties with the rug rolled up or at corner taverns in industrial towns, a squeezebox or a horn was likely to keep the neighbors' feet stomping. A variety of distinct American polka styles evolved in different sections of the Midwest, shaped by the creativity of particular talented and influential musicians. The styles have ethnic names—represented in this compilation are Slovenian, Norwegian, Polish, Croatian, Bohemian (or Czech), Finnish, and Dutchman (from "Deutsch" meaning German). The ethnic names refer to the origin of the musicians' core repertoire and ethnic heritage. It is important to note that the music often differs considerably from the respective old-country traditions. Music and dancing have evolved in the Midwest and are shared among several ethnic groups. In most bands, repertoires and musical styles reflect a mix of ethnic sources, national traditions, and classical and popular music.

The Slovenian style centers around an accordion—originally the diatonic button box, which was largely replaced during the 1940s and 1950s by the chromatic piano accordion. The musical element next in importance is the staccato chording of a four-string banjo, sounded on all four eighth notes of the 2/4 polka bar. A second accordion may be added, playing improvised runs and riffs, or a sax for additional melody. The rhythm section is a "walking" bass and drums.

The Polish style uses reeds and brass backed by a big rectangular Chemnitzer concertina—not to be confused with the much smaller hexagonal Anglo-American and octagonal English concertinas. The Chemnitzer, invented in eastern Germany, is an instrument that now is virtually exclusive to North American polka music (though its close relative the bandoneon is important to Argentine tango). Polish-American concertinists play melody embedded in full, slightly dissonant chords. An electric bass guitar and a trap set are the rhythm section.

Like the Polish style, the Dutchman bands use brass and reeds and a Chemnitzer concertina. There the similarity ends. In contemporary Dutchman bands, the concertina is emphasized as a lead melodic instrument and is played with fewer chords and without dissonace. The brass and reeds blend in a smooth, euphonious tone. The bass horn or tuba provides a bouncy, rollicking bass line over sparse, clean drumming.

Czech or "Bohemian" bands typically use a pair of brass and a pair of reed players backed by a chording piano, tuba, and drums. The brass and reed sections continually exchange roles. While the trumpets take the lead, the reeds play non-improvised runs between the melodic phrases. When the melodic passage repeats, the roles are reversed. Some bands, (like the Clete Bellin Orchestra in this compilation) have replaced the two reed players with an accordion. In contrast with Dutchman style, Czech wind players eschew a pear-shaped tone, favoring instead a piercing, brassy or reedy tonal texture.

With a fiddler up front rather than a squeezebox player, Norwegian-American bands don't fit the popular stereotype of a "polka" band, even though, like the other styles, they also feature the waltz, schottische, and polka as their most frequent tempos. A Norwegian fiddler plays polkas with a clear tone, mostly on single strings, sticking closely to the melody. An additional fiddle or fiddles playing in unison or harmony may join the ensemble. A chording piano is the most frequent accompaniment, but the accordion, guitar, and plectrum banjo often are found in these ensembles.

Finnish polka strongly emphasizes the accordion or a pair of accordions played in a fast, driving style. On slow numbers, waltzes in particular, the style of play is highly ornamented with grace notes and runs. The traditional Finnish repertoire includes many haunting, melancholy tunes in minor keys. Minors are rarely used in traditional German, Slovenian, Czech, or Norwegian dance music, though they do appear in the Polish and Croatian styles. Since many Slovenian accordionists live near the Finns in the Lake Superior area, Finnish bands often play quite a few Slovenian tunes.

Tamburitza combos use the five fretted string instruments of the tamburitza "family" which range in size from smaller than a mandolin to larger than a string bass. The small, oval-shaped *prim* ("preem") is the highest melodic instrument; the next melodic instrument, the *brač* ("brach") is a little smaller than a 3/4 size guitar. The *čelo brač* ("CHEL-o brach") and *bugarija* ("boo-GAR-ee-yah") are shaped like dreadnought guitars with f-holes. The celo plays low melody and counter-melodies, while the *bugarija*, tuned in an open chord, hits rhythm on the weak beats. The *berde* (BEAR-deh), which resembles a giant acoustic guitar, nails the down beats. Tamburitza music originated in a cultural zone where central European musical traditions meet Middle Eastern influences. Songs in polka and waltz tempo alternate with tunes in asymmetrical tempos.

Twentieth Century Changes

In the twentieth century, radio broadcasts and recordings brought the polka to wider audiences. Clear channel WCCO in Minneapolis broadcast Whoopee John's Dutchman music to six or more states, much like WSM's Grand Ole Opry spread southern traditional music far and wide. And the 78 rpm discs of groups like the Romy Gosz Orchestra and Lawrence Duchow's Red Ravens helped them become popular as regional touring dance bands.

Shortly after World War II, almost exactly a century after the original polka craze in Europe, polka music and dancing briefly entered American popular culture in a big way. Slovenian-American accordionist Frankie Yankovic from Cleveland became the biggest star. His hits "Just Because" and "Blue Skirt Waltz" sold from coast to coast. His style melded central European melodies with the American rhythm of a chording banjo and walking bass borrowed from Dixieland jazz. His straightforward vocals were in English as well as the original Slovenian.

Frankie Yankovic's Slovenian polka synthesis attracted many devotees nationwide, but Lil' Wally Jagiello established Chicago as the center of influence for another style, the Polish-American polka. Wally has churned out record after record on his own Jay Jay label, converting many musicians to his so-called "honky" Polish sound. With Yankovic and Lil' Wally leading the charge through the 1950s, polka made a serious run at becoming an established genre of American pop music. Then Elvis Presley hit and changed the music business. By the 1960s, rock n' roll had captured the popular music industry, and polka had retreated to enclaves in a variety of urban and rural grassroots folk communities.

The Polka Network

Although they may be largely excluded from the mainstream media, polka musicians and dancers have organized community institutions to perpetuate their passion. There is a network of polka dance halls, clubs, polka festivals, newsletters, mail-order recordings outlets, accordion makers and dealers, and polka radio and television shows.

A devoted polka enthusiast can subscribe to the national publication *The Polka News*, published in St. Charles, Michigan. It has columnists from around the country and lists performance dates of bands from 38 states. There are also several state and local publications such as the *Texas Polka News*, the *Wisconsin Polka Boosters' Newsletter*, and *Entertainment Bits*, the official organ of the Minnesota Ballroom Operators Association, which has a major section devoted to polka. Through these publications readers can get an update on recent polka dances, catch news of the bands, plan which of the upcoming festivals to participate in, learn where to order new and vintage recordings, and buy or repair instruments.

The booking directory of the Wisconsin Orchestra Leaders Association lists 28 polka festivals, mostly in Wisconsin and neighboring states. There are many more festivals farther afield. The larger polka festivals like the Gibbon (Minnesota) Polka Days and the Pulaski (Wisconsin) Polka Days draw several thousand participants and employ up to two dozen bands. Dancing is the main thing; it is the dancers who organize polka events and who decide which musicians to hire. This type of event features two or three separate dance floors under tents or in a ballroom and concertina jam sessions out among the RVs and trailers parked in a nearby hayfield.

In Wisconsin, radio stations WAUN in Kewaunee and WTKM in Hartford devote most of their programming time to polka. Another dozen commercial stations in Wisconsin feature daily or weekly polka programs. Polka shows even have gained a toehold in public radio—stations WYMS in Milwaukee, WXPR in Rhinelander, and ten statewide stations of Wisconsin Public Radio. Bandleaders such as Jerry Goetsch, Alvin Styczynski, and Dick Rodgers had long running TV programs. Nowadays, syndicated polka TV shows like Colleen Van Ells' "Polka Polka Polka" are invading cable, and State Senator Florian Chmielewski of Sturgeon Lake, Minnesota, claims to have the longest-running program in TV history. "Chmielewski Fun Time" has been a weekly show on Duluth's KDAL ever since 1955—nearly 2,000 programs!

Seven Dance Bands From Wisconsin

Of the Upper Midwestern states, Wisconsin may have the greatest diversity of Euro-American old-time dance bands that play the polka. In this compilation we present seven active bands from Wisconsin representing seven different polka traditions from the Midwest. All of these bands are deeply rooted in the communities they play for; most of the musicians have grown up where their style comes from. Two of the band leaders, Karl Hartwich and Steve Meisner, make their full-time living with their bands, touring extensively throughout the country. The others have day jobs but play a rigorous schedule of weekend and evening dance gigs, which often take them around the Midwest and beyond.

The musical intentions of the bands vary. Steve Meisner and Karl Hartwich are innovators within two distinctively American polka traditions. Steve has experimented with newer instrumental technology like midi interface, while Karl adheres to the traditional acoustic instruments, using many vintage concertinas and horns. Nonetheless, both Steve and Karl strive to introduce original material and new musical ideas.

Clete Bellin and the Oulu Hotshots both play

old-country musical traditions, consciously seeking to remain very close to their old-world models. Both ensembles are concerned to perform their vocals accurately in the original language. Still, the Hotshots will play Slovenian polkas in Finnish style and do the occasional American pop standard like "Red Sails in the Sunset." Upon request, Clete's band can cover 1930s pop tunes and big band foxtrots.

Norm Dombrowski and Tip Bagstad are loyal to old-time styles of music that originated in ethnic communities in the Midwest and for which there is no exact equivalent in Europe. Both the Happy Notes and the Norskedalen Trio have a core repertoire from their own ethnic groups, but they also play quite a bit of other material as well.

Continuing two-way influences across the Atlantic have been very important in the tamburitza tradition. Vatra sings only in Croatian and plays the old country music but not exclusively the old, revered tunes. They perform a lot of newer songs composed in folk style, and themselves compose and play other original music.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Karl and the Country Dutchmen

Karl Hartwich was born in Moline, Illinois in 1961. His father had relocated about 200 miles down the Mississippi River from his hometown near La Crosse, Wisconsin, seeking the good paying factory jobs making agricultural implements in the Quad Cities area. But farming was in his blood so the Hartwichs lived outside of town in rural Orion, Illinois, where they raised hogs and field crops.

Karl was raised in Illinois but his family kept in touch with their Wisconsin relatives. Karl remembers that at least twice a month they would make the trek upriver to attend dances where his distant cousin Syl Liebl and the Jolly Swiss Boys were playing. Syl Liebl, a Dutchman-style concertina player, is a natural musician—inventive, spontaneous, passionate, and original. Little Karl must have absorbed the style like a sponge.

In response to his pleas, Karl received a concertina as a Christmas present at the age of twelve. A few months later he was sitting in with the Swiss Boys, and six months after that, at age 13, founded his own band, now in its 24th year. Karl has turned out to be just as inventive and passionate a musician as his mentor. The concertina is always on his mind. Karl recalls driving the tractor on his family's farm with dance tunes ringing in his head—the engine roaring, his left hand on the wheel, his right hand on the tool box beside the seat pressing out concertina fingerings on the vibrating metal.

As an adult, Karl has moved back upriver to Trempealeau, Wisconsin, a location more central to his band's regular gigs. Virtually every weekend he packs up the van and instrument trailer, and he and his sidemen converge on a dance hall or outdoor polka festival. Casual in his dress and personal style, Karl is nonetheless very serious about his music. He is recognized as the outstanding Dutchman concertinist of his generation. Paradoxically, his music is at once controlled and free. Karl has added more syncopation, chromatic runs, and improvisational flourishes to his play than his predecessors but uses only the old acoustic instruments and adheres to the basic Dutchman style.

Karl is one of the few full-time professional Dutchmen musicians. When not playing music Karl loves living on the river. He is an avid fisherman. Between his band's dance gigs he catches Mississippi River catfish on treble hooks baited with chicken livers and then fillets and fries them to perfection.

1. Minnesota Polka

Karl Hartwich, concertina; Don Burghardt, trumpet and valve trombone; Myron Meulbauer, trumpet, saxophone, clarinet; Marty Nachreiner, trumpet, saxophone, clarinet; Doug Young, tuba; Jerry Minar, keyboard; Holly Johnson, drums (from *Is Everybody Happy*, Karl and the Country Dutchmen 4889 91.1.CD)

This is a Dutchman signature tune made popular both by Whoopee John Wilfahrt, who is often called the originator of Dutchman music, and by Harold Loeffelmacher's Six Fat Dutchmen, the New Ulm, Minnesota band which (like Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys) provided the name to its musical genre. Karl's arrangement uses crisp horn lines alternating with his concertina over rhythm provided by a bouncy tuba and sparse, purposeful drumming. On this tune, Karl puts a big emphasis on the rhythmic accents and syncopation known as "Dutchman snap."

2. Karl's Bad Schottische

(written by Karl Hartwich)

Karl Hartwich, concertina; Mike Cielecki, banjo; Joyce Cielecki, keyboard; Frank Galewski, tuba;

Kim Ristow, drums
(from *Is Everybody Happy*, Karl and the Country Dutchmen 4889 91.1.CD)

One of the many original tunes Karl has composed in the traditional Dutchman style to showcase his concertina virtuosity. The schottische is a perky 4/4-time dance very popular with Germans and Scandinavians in the Midwest. It can be danced in couples, threes, fours or in a big ring (as seen on the cover of this booklet). The scat singing Karl and his band do on this number reflects his freewheeling yet serious approach to the music.

3. Fleeting Memories Waltz
Karl Hartwich, concertina; Mike Cielecki, banjo; Tony Kaminski, tuba; Jeff Langen, drums; Laurie Moran, keyboard
(from *Karl & The Country Dutchmen: Concertina Solos with the Old and New Hengel Concertinas*, JMB Sound JMB31005 1995)

In playing this waltz, Karl "breaks the rules" of Dutchman style. Dutchman improvisation is usually limited to grace notes or runs between melodic passages. Here Karl improvises quite freely, considerably departing from the tune of this well-known Polish folk song, *Jak szypko*. Living on the Mississippi River, it isn't surprising that Karl and his sidemen appreciate and sometimes play improvised traditional jazz. It is significant, however, that on this tune Karl does not use "blue notes" but improvises with the Dutchman genre's own set of tonal conventions.

4. Gary's Polka
Karl Hartwich, concertina; Mike Cieleki, banjo; Joyce Cielecki, keyboard; Frank Galewski, tuba; Holly Johnson, drums
(from *Karl & The Country Dutchmen: Concertina Solos with the Old and New Hengel Concertinas*, JMB Sound JMB31005 1995)

Karl attributes this tune, also called "Kaputzer," to Leo Johnson, a tuba player from Minnesota. The tune has also caught on with Scandinavian fiddlers. Karl is playing his 1937 Patek triple note concertina on this recording, which produces a rich, reedy sound and showcases his awesome instrumental skills.

The Norskedalen Trio
Tilford "Tip" Bagstad was born on a western Wisconsin tobacco farm in the 1930s. The Norwegian farmers in the area southeast of La Crosse around Westby and Coon Valley have clung to their old-country traditions with the same tenacity it takes to farm in this rugged, unglaciated coulee country.

Tip has recently retired from raising beef cattle. For 18 years he also had an off-the-farm job with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources supervising a trout habitat restoration crew. It was a job he could be enthusiastic about because he is also an avid trout fisherman. His wife Eleanor, a skilled piano player, has been an elementary school teacher, and both the Bagstads have been active community leaders. Tip frequently served on the boards of local organizations. Proud Norwegians, Tip and Eleanor have been key players in the establishment of Norskedalen, a local community organization that operates a Norwegian cultural center and historical farmstead museum.

Though Tip had been a music enthusiast for a long time, he was 48 before he took up the fiddle. There was no shortage of older Norwegian fiddlers in his area to learn tunes from. In 1982 Tip and Eleanor joined forces with dairy-farm wife and a fellow Norskedalen stalwart Beatrice Olson to form the cultural center's house band—The Norskedalen Trio. The trio performs for weddings, for Sons of Norway lodges, for visitors to the Norskedalen museum, and for community events like Syttendemai, the annual Norwegian independence day festival in Westby. They perform in Minnesota and Iowa as well as in Wisconsin, playing a repertoire of Norwegian and American old time tunes.

Musicians: Tilford "Tip" Bagstad, fiddle; Beatrice Olson, accordion; Eleanor Bagstad, piano, perform on each track.
(all tracks from the LP *The Norskedalen Trio*, Encore Productions E-1083 1983)

5. Remmem Valsen
This Norwegian tune has entered the repertoire of many midwestern polka bands as "The Peek-a-Boo Waltz." Tip's fiddle plays the lead, blended with Bea Olson's accordion, to the rhythm of

Eleanor playing chords on the piano. The waltz is by far the most important tempo in the Norwegian-American dance repertoire.

6. Fylke Dans
This tune is in a rollicking 4/4 tempo suitable for dancing the schottische, as it is called in America, or *reinlander* as it is called in Norway —a very popular social dance among Scandinavian-Americans.

7. All Smiles Tonight
Tip learned this tune at an old-time fiddlers' gathering in Yankton, SD. It is a nineteenth-century sentimental song in waltz tempo typical of the American repertoire warmly embraced by Norwegian-American fiddlers.

8. Ed Quall's Polka
Tip learned this polka from the late Leonard Finseth, an outstanding fiddler from Blair, Wisconsin. Leonard had named it after the fiddler he learned it from—a typical Norwegian-American tune-naming custom.

Norm Dombrowski's
Happy Notes Orchestra
When Norm Dombrowski was a teenager in the 1950s, he wasn't particularly inspired by the polka bands active in his hometown of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, a rural area of central Wisconsin populated by Polish-American dairy and potato farmers. The Dutchman style of polka was the popular sound then at old-time dances, but according to Norm, the bands he heard didn't sound lively or spontaneous. Perched behind bandstands, the musicians' seemed to have their noses stuck in their sheet music.

Then, in 1956, Chicago's Lil' Wally Jagiello gave legendary performances for two nights at the Peplin Ballroom in Mosinee, just north of Stevens Point. Attendees say huge crowds overflowed the ballroom, standing six deep in a ring around the building. Norm made it inside, where he heard Polish polka sound modern yet firmly grounded in the Polish folk music familiar to him from house parties and weddings. Norm was impressed: there was no sheet music, and the musicians were as lively as a rock n' roll band. Norm decided he wanted to play in this style, and he was determined to become a singing drummer like his new hero Lil' Wally. By 1960 he was able to start the Happy Notes Orchestra with three friends, playing for dances locally and as far afield as Minneapolis and Chicago.

Norm's musical talents seem to have been inherited by his children. By the 1980s, the Happy Notes evolved into a family band as Norm's sons and daughters grew old enough to become competent musicians. Unlike many Polish polka bands, Norm did not adopt the modern, streamlined style known as "Dyno" or "Push," choosing to remain closer to the "honky" style of music. Norm stresses Polish instrumental tunes and old songs but also includes German, Czech, and Norwegian numbers in the band's repertoire to satisfy patrons of other ethnic backgrounds.

Musicans: Norm Dombrowski, drums and vocals; Ken Camlek, trumpet and vocals; Mark Dombrowski, saxophone, clarinet, and vocals; Marie Kubowski, piano, concertina, violin and vocals; Jon Dombrowski, accordion and vocals; Joe Dombrowski, trumpet and vocals; Jane Dombrowski, vocals

(all tracks from *It's My 35th Anniversary*, Gold Records G-C-5001 1993)

9. Dorothy's Oberek
The Happy Notes' raucous sound features trumpet, clarinet, and concertina playing contrapuntally over a rhythm section of electric bass guitar and drums. The *oberek* is a fast 3/4 time dance characteristic of the Polish-American style. An *oberek* has strong accents on the second and third beats for seven measures. Then there is an accent shift to the downbeat on the last (eighth) measure of the tune. Norm says this is an old tune, and he doesn't know who the Dorothy in the title might be.

10. Mountaineer Polka
The mountaineers referred to in the title of this tune are the Gorali, a distinct regional Polish culture group from the Tatras Mountains in southern Poland. Marie Kubowski's use of the fiddle and the modal feel of the tune are characteristic of Gorali music.

11. Chicago Waltz
Norm has heard this waltz played at Polish weddings around Stevens Point for as long as he can remember.

12. Happy Fellow
(Jestem Chlopak Wesoly)
Polka musicians frequently stress that theirs is

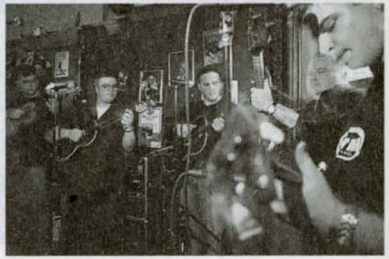
"happy music." The "happy fellow" in this song seems to be a spurned lover who makes a point to be quite cheerful about going out dancing and drinking. The Happy Notes sing this Polish folksong with a lot of verve.

Jestem Chlopak Wesoly
Nie potrzebuje ja ciebie,
Bo mam mysle inne w glowie.

I am a happy fellow
I don't need you
Because I have other things on my mind.

A jak Sobata przyjdzie
Na dobry taniec ja pojde
I dobra wodkie Wypijie.

And when Saturday comes
To a good dance I am going
And good vodka I will drink.



Vatra

The name of this tamburitza combo means "fire" in Croatian. It is appropriate for this group of young musicians whose instrumental skills are pyrotechnic. Vatra's members are all young Croatian-American men from Milwaukee, born in the 1970s. They learned their music and singing during the 1980s in Milwaukee's junior tamburitza ensembles, which are community-based ethnic youth orchestras and dance groups.

The groups rehearsed at St. Augustine's Church, a Croatian parish surrounded by the hulking remains of the closed-down Allis-Chalmers tractor factory, a plant that provided a livelihood to many local Croatian-Americans in previous generations. On the tile floor of the church school gymnasium, the boys who became Vatra met virtually every Sunday afternoon from the age of eight through their high school years to hone their playing and singing skills.

Learning the basics of the instrument by playing simple orchestral arrangements of Croatian folk songs, the boys soon became fluent in the idiom of the tamburitza. Then came opportunities to play in a small combo—accompanying other group members on stage in dance choreographies, playing for parties and receptions, or just jamming. At picnics and church dinners they watched and listened and sometimes were allowed to sit in with established regional tamburitza combos like Zagreb and Slanina.

In 1991, while they were still teenagers, Vatra started to take professional jobs. As they matured, Vatra eventually gained the reputation of being one of the best American tamburitza combos. They have played the Croatian ethnic circuit of lamb roasts and fraternal lodge halls from Pennsylvania to Los Angeles. Recently Vatra also has begun to "cross-over," playing for mainstream audiences in a "world music" bar on Milwaukee's trendy Brady Street and on Wisconsin Public Radio's "Hotel Milwaukee" program.

Musicians: Ryan Werner, prim and brač and čelo; Chris Ulm, brač and vocals, Boris Kuzmanović, brač and vocals; Dave Požgaj, bugarija and vocals; Ivo Gretić berde.
(All tracks from *Pravi Hrvatski Dom,* Sarma Records V-001 1997)

13. Gde su oni lepi cajti?
(Where have the good times gone?)

As is typical of American tamburitza combos, Vatra plays a repertoire drawn from various regions of Croatia. This song, in polka tempo, is sung in the Kajkavian dialect of northwestern Croatia. The title features the German loan word Zeit (*cajti* in Croatian). The lyrics about a poor peasant who loses his sweetheart to a richer man and therefore sets out into the world is a typical tale of emigration.

Navek sem bez grunta bil siromak
Rože sem susedu kral
Da bi ih Rožici svoji dal
To je ljubavi bil znak.

Chorus: *Gde su oni lepi cajti*
Gde smo se skrivečki znali v kleti najti
Pak smo tam si kušlec dali
Slatki kakti med.

Da ne bum tak sam v teške dane te
Koj' put sem znal pojt' vu kvar
Al Rožu pozabil nis nigdar
Z drugom ne bum ženil se

Oženil japek je z drugim nju
Zato se spremam ja v svet
Vrnul' se ne bum još puno let
Kaj bi kaj bez drage tu

I have always been a landless poor man
I stole roses from my neighbor's garden
To give them to my little Rosie
That was a sign of love.

Where have all the good times gone?
When we used to secretly meet in the vineyard shed
There we shared a little kiss
As sweet as honey.

So as not to be alone in these hard days,
Sometimes I've cheated a little bit.
But I will never forget Rose;
I will not marry another.

Her father married her to another,
That's why I'm setting out into the world.
I won't return for many a year.
What would I do here without my dear one?

14. Bunjevačko kolo/S one strane Dunava (Bunjevac kolo/On the other side of the Danube)

This tune is the kolo dance of the Bunjevci, a Croatian ethnic group which migrated from the Dinaric mountains to the plains of northeastern Croatia. It is joined to a wedding song in the frenetic style of the Romani tamburitza players of that region.

S one strane Dunava gazda pravi svatove
Velike svatove, sve na travi zelenoj

Zovu mene da igram a ja kažem da neznam.
Istina neću ja, nemam čizme da igram.

On that side of the Danube, the head of the household is putting on a wedding feast
A big wedding feast, all on the green grass.

They call on me to dance but I say I don't know how.
The truth is I will not. I don't have boots for dancing.

15. Jeste li čuli 'judi (People, have you heard?)

This song is steeped in the traditions of Dalmatia, the coastal region of Croatia—its maritime commerce, the limestone karst landscape, and the infamous *bura*, a northeast wind which ravages the Adriatic shores. Dalmatian melodic style shares a lot with Italian folk music. This song, in waltz tempo and sung in the dialect of the Croatian coast, is a straightforward treatment of a maritime tragedy.

Jeste li čuli 'judi,
Dogodilo se zlo
Ivanu klakaru, tmurna ja,
Potopija se brod.

I parti je iz Stona
Prevozija je klak
Zapuhala velika bura
Pa ga potopija.

I bija je veliki sprovod
I velika žalost
Borbeni Ivanis, tugna ja,
Drža mu je govor.

Nosiču crni veo
Crniji od ôciju,
Crljenu košulju nosiču ja
Žalitću klakara.

People have you heard,
An evil thing has happened
The ship of Ivan the lime burner,
Oh sad me, has sunk.

And when he left the town of Ston
Hauling lime
A big northeast wind blew up
And sunk him.

There was a big funeral
And great sorrow
Ivanis the fighter, oh sad me,
Did the funeral oration.

I will wear a black veil,
Blacker than my eyes.
I'll wear a red shirt,
I'll mourn for the lime burner.

16. Bijeli slapovi (White Waves)

Ryan Werner, the combo's youngest member is from a prominent Milwaukee tamburitza family; his father, aunt and uncles are noted players. This original number by Ryan showcases his virtuoso playing of the *prim* tamburitza.

The Steve Meisner Band

Steve Meisner was born in 1960 in Whitewater, a small Wisconsin town southeast of Milwaukee. At the time, Steve's father Verne was already an established musician, an accordion prodigy whose original band, Verne Meisner and the Polka Boys, was aptly named—the members were still in their early teens when they started taking professional gigs. That was the early 1950s, just in the wake of Frankie Yankovic's ascendancy. The Slovenian style of polka had become one of the most popular forms of music in Wisconsin. By the 1960s, the Verne Meisner Band was one of the best known polka groups in the region.

Steve got an ambivalent message from Verne when he showed an early interest in music. Seven-year-old Steve's entreaties to his father to teach him to play were rebuffed at first. Then Verne thrust a momentous decision on his young son: "If you begin to play, you have to promise that you'll never quit." Steve leapt at the challenge without a safety net and made it. Only a year later his father began to bring Steve along to play some jobs with the Meisner band, often placing the diminutive kid on a box so he could reach the microphone.

Steve started his own band while still in his teens and has continued the family tradition in the polka music business, playing regionally and nationally, producing his own CDs and videos, and organizing polka tours and cruises. Steve acknowledges his musical debt to the Slovenian-style musicians of the previous generation but has pushed the envelope of the form in hot arrangements and in original material that expresses a wide range of emotions.

17. Jammin' Polkas

Steve Meisner, accordion, bass, piano, and vocals; Rick Hartmann, drums; Larry Sokolowski, saxophone; Carl Hartmann, banjo
(from *Jammin' Polkas* HG Records HG-5015 1988)

"Jammin' Polkas" is Steve Meisner's tribute to his musical mentors—a jumping medley of several of the signature tunes from the outstanding Slovenian polka musicians of the previous generation—Louie Bashell, Johnny Pecon, Frankie Yankovic and Steve's father, Verne Meisner. The opening and closing vocals give Steve's reasons for playing polkas today.

18. Meisner Magic

Steve Meisner, accordion, bass, and piano; Verne Meisner, accordion; Carl Hartmann, banjo; Larry Sokolowski, saxophone; Rick Hartmann, drums
(from *Meisner Magic* HG Records HG 5029 1984)

This is an original polka tune by Steve, performed with his father, Verne. One accordion plays lead while the other improvises runs and fills between melodic lines.

19. Jump River Polka

Steve Meisner, button accordion, bass, and piano; Verne Meisner, accordion; Larry Sokolowski, saxophone; Don Hunjadi, clarinet; Rick Hartmann, drums; Carl Hartmann, banjo
(from *Meisner Magic* HG Records HG 5029 1984)

Steve has mastered the diatonic button accordion, an older, less versatile instrument spurned by his father's generation of polka musicians favor of the modern piano accordion. This original tune by Steve, named after a scenic river in northwestern Wisconsin, showcases the vibrato-tinged sound of the "wet-tuned button box."

The Oulu Hotshots

County Trunk FF is a narrow country road running through Bayfield County's Oulu Township in far northwestern Wisconsin. In jest, Bill Kangas reckons that it stands for "Finn Freeway." On this hardscrabble cutover land thirty miles east of Duluth, named for the northernmost province of Finland, Finnish-American farmers scratch out a living not far from the south shore of Lake Superior. The Oulu Hotshots, singer/drummer Bill Kangas and accordionists Glen and Leroy Lahti, grew up in this highly ethnic community. As children they heard the music of local Finnish musicians Walter and Ailie Johnson. And they discovered old Finnish-American recordings—78s with the music of songwriters like Hiski Salomaa and 1950s lps from accordionist Viola Turpeinen, a Finnish-American cultural icon.

In the 1970s, young accordion prodigies brothers Glen and Leroy Lahti began to perform for local events with their elder brother Archie on drums. When Archie shipped out on the Great Lakes iron ore boats in 1974, Bill Kangas joined the group as a singer and drummer. Bill's strong Finnish and English language vocals, his insistent drumming, and the energetic accordion playing of the two Lahti boys made the Oulu Hotshots a sensation in the western Lake Superior area.

The Hotshots have played at all of the major Finnish-American festivals across the United States, from Massachusetts to California. They also have traveled to Finland, where their talents are appreciated. The Oulu Hotshots performed at Finland's largest folk festival in Kaustinen. But they did not ignore their hometown's Old World namesake—they also played right on the town square at the Garlic Festival in Oulu, Finland.

20. Säkkijärven Polka

Glenn Lahti, accordion; LeRoy Lahti, accordion; Bill Kangas, drums and vocals
(from *Oulu Hotshots—Bringin' It Back: Old Time Finnish Music* Inland Sea Recordings 83033)

The Finnish polka repertoire includes many tunes in minor keys, the result, perhaps, of Russian musical influences. This song exalts the beauty of Karelia, a territory of ethnic Finns just east of Finland, which remains a part of Russia and the town of Säkkijärvi, which was ceded to Russia after the war. According to Bill Kangas, "Säkkijärven polka" was used by the Finnish Army to jam Russian radio signals during the Russo-Finnish Wars of 1939 and 1941-44. During a crucial point in the war, the Finns are said to have played this song for three days straight.

On kauniina muistona Karjalan maa mutta
vieläkin syömmessä soinnahtaa
Kun soittajan sormista kuulatsaa Säkkijärven
polkka
Se polkka taas menneitä mieleen tuo ja se outoa
kaipuuta rintaan luo

Hei soittaja haitarin soita suo Säkkijärven polkka!

Nuoren ja vanhan se tansiin vie ei sille polkalle
vertaa lie
Sen kanssa on vaikka mieron tie Säkkijärven
polkka
Siina on liplatus laineitten siinä on huojunta
honkien
Karjala soi kaikki tietää sen Säkkijärven polkka

Tule tule tyttö nyt kanssani tansiin kun polkka
niin herkästi helkähtää
Voi hevo surko ja hammasta purkoo kun sil on
niin ihmeesti suurempi pää
Tule tule tyttö nyt kanssani tansiin niin meil on
riemu ja suvinen sää

Säkkijärvi se meiltä on pois mutta jäi toki
sentään polkka
Kun rakkaat rannat on jääneet taa niin vielä se
kulkija lohdun saa
Kun kuuntelee soittoa kaihoisaa Säkkijärven
polkka
Se polkka on vain mutta sellainen että tielle se
johtavi muistojen
On sointuna Karjalan kaunoisen Säkkijärven
polkka

The Karelian land remains a beautiful
memory, still it rings in the heart
When you hear the music of Säkkijärvi from
the fingers of the musician
That polka brings bygone times to mind and a
strange longing to the heart.

Hey, musician, let the Säkkijärven polka play!

It tempts the young and old to dance, that
polka has no match
You can travel the homeless road with the
Säkkijärven polka
It has the ripple of the waves and the hum of
the pine trees
Karelia sings, everyone knows the Säkkijärven
polka.

Girl, come on and dance with me as the polka so gently resounds
The horse may worry and gnash his teeth, he has a great big head
Come on girl and dance with me; we have the joyous summer eve.

Säkkijärvi is gone from us but the polka has remained
When the beloved shores are left behind, the wanderer is comforted
By the yearning sound of the Säkkijärven polka
It is only a polka but it leads to the path of memories
As a sound of beautiful Karelia, the Säkkijärven polka.

21. Maailman Matti
(Matti, Man of the World)

Glenn Lahti, accordion; Leroy Lahti, accordion; Bill Kangas, drums and vocals
(from *Oulu Hotshots—Bringin' It Back: Old Time Finnish Music* Inland Sea Recordings 83033)

This song is attributed to Hiski Saaloma, a Finnish immigrant to Northern Michigan, a tailor with a talent for writing topical songs that reflected his leftist views. A master of irony, Hiski humorously glorifies the Finnish itinerant worker—Matti, the man of the world.

Mina Matti olen tässä maailmassa vaikka varreltani matala
Eikä ilojani murehiksi muutta voi tämä maailma katala
En luotu ole itkemään enka ohdakkeita kitkemään

Hurraa hurraa hoi minun lauluni soi näillä maailman markkinoil

Näitä markkinoita maailmassa matkaillut olen vuosia monia
Enkä riijaamatta ole jättänyt noita tyttöjä somia
Mutta miniätä mammallen sitä tuonut mä vielä en

Jo pienestä pojast olen iskenyt minä kortilla nakkia
Vaikka pappa ja mamma ne toivoivat tästä poijasta pappia
Sitä mammani suri hei kun pappia tullut ei.

My name is Matt, and I'm a man of the world, even though I'm quite a small man
This mean world can't change my happiness
I wasn't born to cry or pull thistles.

Chorus: Hooray, hooray, my song rings in the markets of the world.

I've been traveling this world for many years
And I haven't forgotten to court many beautiful women.

I still haven't found a daughter-in-law for my mother.

Since I was small I have made a living playing cards
Even though my parents wanted me to join the clergy
My mother is sad that I did not become a preacher.

22. Orpopojan Valssi
(Orphan Boy's Waltz)

Leroy Lahti, accordion; Glenn Lahti, accordion; Bill Kangas, drums and vocals; Marie Mattson, violin
(from *Bill Kangas & The Lahti Brothers* CMS Records 4804)

The image of the wanderer and the orphan figure prominently in some of the best known Finnish folk songs, "Kuulkerin Valssi" (Vagabond Waltz) and this song. This nineteenth century waltz describes the hopes and dreams of an orphan boy.

Ohdakkeista astua on orpopojan tie
Tie pitka ja mittaamaton
Ei koskaan kotilieden lampohon se vie
Miss äitini kehrännyt on
Vaan aina maailmalle oudon orren alle
Laina lattialle kallistan mä pään
Mä taivasalla tanssin kohtaloni valssin
Onnestani unta nään
Mä oon orpona mutt en oo orjana
Miksi itkemään kun ma kerran onnest unta nään
Se on aarre mun siit on puolet sun
Tule tyttö jaa se kanssani mun.

An orphan boy's journey in life is endless and thorny.
The road never leads to my hearth where Mother is spinning at her wheel
But always out in the world
Under an unfamiliar roof
And on a borrowed floor I stay to sleep.
Under the sky I dance the waltz of my destiny.

I'm an orphan but not a slave
Why cry when dreaming of my happiness.
That is my treasure, half is yours, young lady
If you will come and share it with me.

23. Finn Polka

Leroy Lahti, accordion; Glenn Lahti, accordion; Bill Kangas, drums; Marie Matteson, violin
(from *Bill Kangas & The Lahti Brothers* CMS Records 4804)

The two accordions played by the Lahti brothers and Marie Mattson's violin expertly complement each other on this polka tune played at the fast 2/4 tempo favored by Finish-American polka dancers.

He's busy night and day; let him bum around.
He will find me. I know him.

He was going to our village;
He was bringing love to my heart and
bouquets of roses
He isn't coming anymore, maybe he's angry
Where did he go? He probably didn't love
me anyway.

26. Around the Moon

Clete Bellin, piano, vocals; John Weidow, trumpet; Joe Jerabek, tuba; Mike Hager, trumpet; Diana Schroeder, accordion; Bill Jerabek, drums, vocal harmony
(from *Clete Bellin & His Orchestra Invites You To "Czech It Out"* CJB Records 1993)

This polka features lyrics in Czech and English which refer to a folk weather belief important to Czech farmers in the Old World and the New.

Okolo měsice kola se dělají
Ty naše panenky, ty naše panenky, tisíce hledají

Tisíce hledají samy je nemají
jen ty jedny šaty, jen ty jedny šaty, co na sobě mají.

V pátek je vyperou, v sobutu naškrobí
a v neděli na ulici, a v neděli na ulici, parádu
dělají.

(Sung in English)
Ring ring around the moon. There's going
to be a change.
Let the music play all day; rainy weather's on
the way
There's going to be a change.

Translation of Czech verses:
Around the moon there is a ring
You, our little miss are looking intently.

Looking intently, all you have is the one dress
That you are wearing.

On Friday you wash it, on Saturday you
starch it
And on Sunday on the street you make a
parade.

Richard March received his Ph.D. in folklore from Indiana University and he has been the Folk Arts Coordinator for the Wisconsin Arts Board since 1983. He co-curated the Wisconsin Program at the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. He is an active musician and plays the button accordion in the Downhome Dairyland Band.

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To order music or for booking information contact: Karl & The Country Dutchmen, P.O. Box 81, Trempealeau, WI 54661, (608) 534-7450.

Steve Meisner: *A Meisner Mini Concert; Jammin' Polkas; Songs of Love; An Ivory Romance* (cassette only). To order or for booking information contact: Steve Meisner, 205 Hazel St., Whitewater, WI 53190-2119, (414) 473-7184.

Verne Meisner: *Those Were the Days; Verne, Verne, Verne, Verne; El Rio Drive; Verne Meinser Plays a Song For You; Polkarina; The Happy Sounds of Verne Mesiner; Dance Holiday; Martinis, Manhattans, & Meisner.* To order music or for booking information contact: Verne Meisner, 1309 S. Grand Ave., Waukesha, WI 53186, (414) 547-5379.

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Karl and the Country Dutchmen

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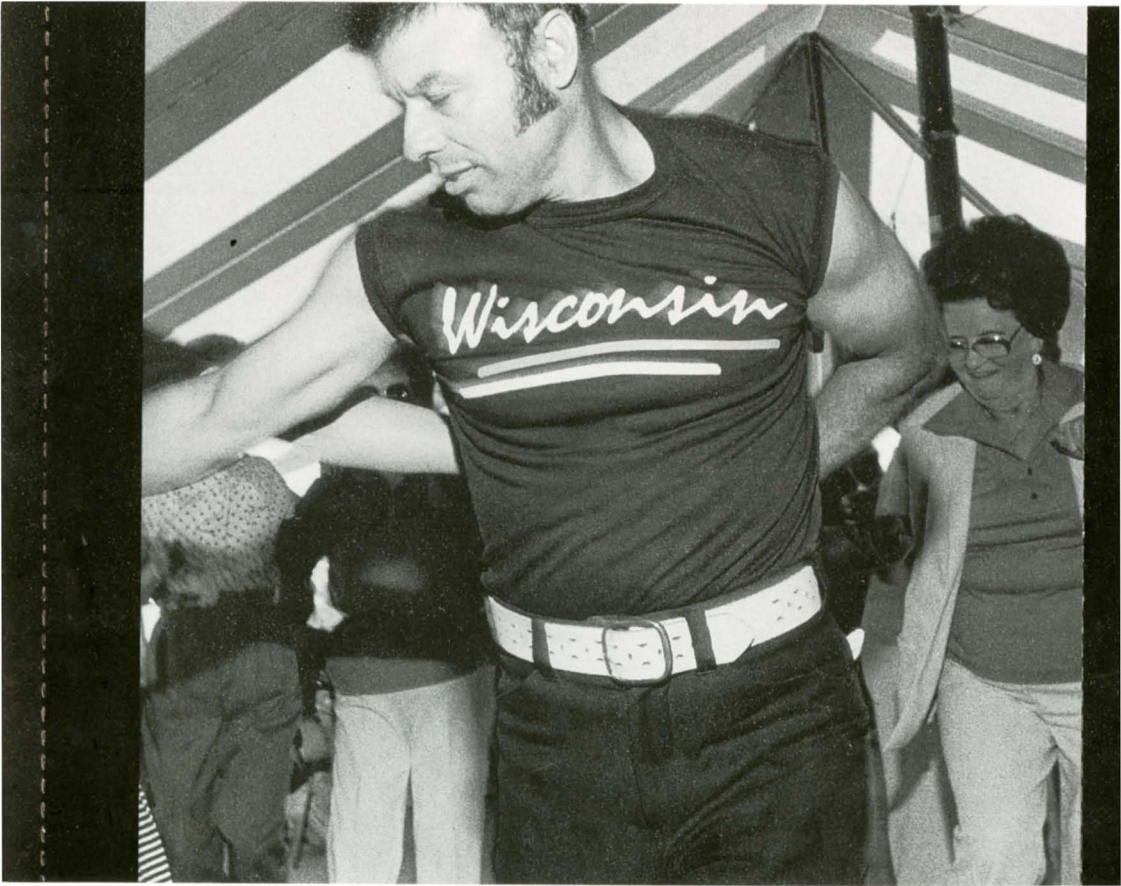
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