

A Special Series of Music Concerts and Dances
devoted to
**MASTERS OF REGIONAL &
ETHNIC TRADITIONS**

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Concert and Dance

Conjunto Music of Texas and Mexico

ECOS DEL NORTE

American Legion Hall

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Concert

Chinese Erhu and Missouri Fiddle Music

JI QIU MIN

VESTA JOHNSON

Studio Theatre

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Concert and Dance

Music from the Tatra Mountains of Poland

POLISH HIGHLANDERS

American Legion Hall

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Concert

Country and Urban Blues

YANK RACHELL

JOHN CAMPBELL

Studio Theatre

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

Concert and Dance

German-American Music

KARL AND THE COUNTRY

DUTCHMEN

American Legion Hall



FRIDAY, MAY 3

Concert

Music from Puerto Rico and Ireland

ANDANDO SOLO

JIMMY KEANE

Studio Theatre

Concert-only programs will be held at the Libertyville High School Studio Theatre, 708 W. Park (Route 176), Libertyville, IL.

Concert/Dances will be held at the American Legion Hall, 715 N. Milwaukee (Route 21) in Libertyville. Concert/Dance programs will feature a concert followed by a participatory dance with demonstrations and basic instruction. All events will begin at 8:00 p.m.

For tickets or other information call:

(708) 367-0707.

This series is supported in part by grants from Baxter Healthcare Corporation, the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.


DAVID ADLER
CULTURAL CENTER

THE POLISH HIGHLANDERS: SLAVIC MOUNTAIN MUSIC

America's Polish community has been in the national limelight frequently over the last two decades, especially since the Solidarity party in Poland sparked the peaceful revolution that led to the incredibly rapid unraveling of the Iron Curtain. A lesser known fact is that Poles have been important players in the American experiment as far back as the Jamestown colony. A group of skilled Polish workers who arrived there in 1609 helped assure the survival of that fragile settlement, for Jamestown was populated mainly by English gentlemen ill-prepared in the practical necessities of pioneering.

Polish immigration to America has continued up to the present, reaching a peak around the time of World War I. While earlier Polish emigres were skilled craftsmen or families with sufficient capital to become farm owners, the great wave of immigration that began in the 1880s brought many rural villagers with no skills and little capital. Most of these new arrivals found jobs in the industrial regions of the Northeast and the Great Lakes. In their new urban homes, they banded together to create a new Polonia focused around the social and cultural life of the parish church and corner tavern. The result is two more surprising facts: (1) Chicago is the city with the second largest Polish population in the world (trailing only Warsaw), and (2) Polish is the fourth most common language spoken in the United States (after English, Spanish and German).

Traditional Polish music, however, didn't make a mark in this country until this century. In the 1920, the record companies discovered that there was a market in various urban ethnic communities for the rural music brought over by village musicians who emigrated. Chicago quickly became a hotbed for the recording of a variety of styles of music from the Polish countryside. Most of the traditional dance music recorded in the '20s featured one or more violins in combination with a cello or string bass and perhaps a clarinet or accordion. The concertina also made an early appearance in Polish-American circles.

The Great Depression put an end to this phase of recording activity; and by World War II, when Polish-American music once again began to appear in the record catalogs, the polka was in ascendance. Today, when most people think of Polish music, they think of the polka. In truth, the polka was a dance supposedly invented in Czechoslovakia that developed into a raging fad in the ballrooms of Europe and America by the mid-1800s. In its 20th-century

manifestation, the polka is largely a pan-ethnic phenomenon with recognizable German, Slovenian, Polish and Mexican styles. Chicago is frequently credited with being the capital city of the "honky" sound developed by several Polish polka pioneers.

The music of the Polish Highlanders, however, hearkens back to the traditional rural music recorded here in the 1920s. It is the music associated with the social life and customs that American Poles reshaped in their new urban villages. The major portion of the band's repertoire is derived from the Podhale region in southeastern Poland, from the people who lived in the Tatra Mountains. These ancient melodies, in a style known as *muzyka Goralska* were first played in Chicago by such locally important musicians as fiddler Karol Stoch and Jan Krzysiak and singers Stanislaw Bachleda and Antonina Blazonczyk.

Tatra music is to the polka as American old-timey fiddling is to bluegrass. The first of each pair are more archaic in origin and more tradition-bound in their development. Like bluegrass, the polka is a tradition-based accommodation to the modern world, creating a new mix out of a variety of old sounds and musical innovations. Tatra music, like much of old-time fiddling, is tied to a specific mountainous region. Both polka and bluegrass music have spread easily beyond any regional boundaries. The older styles come from the countryside, from the social customs of relatively isolated communities. The newer sounds are working class musics that are well at home in urban settings.

Many stylistic similarities can be found drawn between Polish highland fiddling and the traditional fiddle music from the American south, what many people like to call "mountain music." Most of the Polish tunes are in a 4/4 meter with the cello and second violin playing strong, sharp bow strokes on each beat, while the lead violin elaborates a high reaching melody line. In one regional style of American fiddling, the fiddle plays in duple meter to the starkly rhythmic, sparsely harmonic accompaniment of the 5-string banjo played in clawhammer fashion. In both styles, the most archaic tunes (those greatly favored by connoisseurs of the style) tend to be tonally irregular when compared to the modern major scale. In contrast, both polka and bluegrass music have adapted to the musical "progress," and are therefore more accessible to ears attuned to mainstream musical standards.

The music of the Polish highlands is, of course, distinctive in its own right. While American fiddlers play more with a pulse that groups easily into twos, Tatra fiddle music is measured in fours but is sometimes rhythmically irregular. The Polish tradition offers a greater range and combinations of tempos. A single piece may change speed halfway through, or perhaps a faster dance tune is tacked on at the end of a slower vocal melody. American fiddlers tend to keep songs and instrumentals in more clearly separated compartments.

Beyond a few general similarities, the fiddle music of the Polish highlands stands out as radically different in density and in feel from America's mountain music. These sounds, that are new to many of our ears, are really quite ancient. Originally created by Polish sheepherders who wandered through the Carpathian Mountains, this music has much in common with that created by neighboring mountain peoples in Slovakia, the Ukraine, and even as far south as Romania. Brought to the shores of America, it had its day in the sun until it slipped back into relative obscurity with the onset of the Great Depression. Now, thanks to Chicago's Polish Highlanders, it can be enjoyed and danced to once again.

For the past fourteen years, the Polish Highlanders have played around the world at festivals, on radio and television, as well as being an intrinsic part of the Midwest Polish community. The members of the Polish Highlanders include: Jan Lesniak playing first fiddle, Maciej Lesniak on harmony fiddle, Tomek Lassak playing rhythm fiddle, Halina Maciata also on rhythm fiddle and Andrzej Tokarz playing bass. Dances will be demonstrated by Marion Brya and Janina Maciata.

-- Paul L. Tyler

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