

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

KARL AND THE COUNTRY DUTCHMEN:
QUINTESSENTIAL GERMAN-AMERICAN DANCE MUSIC

Karl and the Country Dutchmen may be accurately referred to either as a polka band or as an old-time band. But each label requires some elaboration for an audience that I guess would think of old-time music primarily as fiddles and banjos, or envision polka bands mostly in the image of the Chicagoland's Polish "honky" style.

In rural areas of the upper Midwest-- particularly in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula-- "old-time music" often means a melange of dance music and songs from a variety of ethnic sources. Besides pop and country standards, the idiom includes myriad waltzes, polkas and schottisches along with an occasional reel or breakdown for square dancing. In some circles, alternatively, the term covers a relatively pure repertoire representing a single ethnic tradition: Scandinavian, Swiss, German or Czech. In the case of the latter two closely related traditions, old-time music falls squarely within the variegated complex of polka music.

Which brings us to the second term in need of further elaboration. Polka music is vastly popular in America, but has received surprisingly little attention from either pop music critics or folklorists. There are four general ethnic styles that co-exist and intertwine to form this vital musical subculture: Polish, Slovenian, Czech and German. The first two are urban idioms embraced by musicians who do not shy away from technological or musical innovation and who frequently cross ethnic boundaries or who borrow repertoire from the popular mainstream. Nevertheless, Polish polka bands-- with brass, reeds, concertina and accordion-- produce a sound that is easily distinguished from the Slovenian-style bands that feature two accordions playing in counterpoint over a spare but solid rhythm section.

The Czech and German styles, to the contrary, are primarily rural, conservative, and ethnically or regionally singular. Czechs and Germans, culturally close in Europe, have lived as neighbors in rural settlements in the United States, especially in eastern Texas and the upper Midwest. Thus midwestern Czech and German polka bands share some elements of repertoire, reflecting the Old-Country roots of this variety of old-time music-- and a few stylistic features. Both are twentieth-century developments synthesizing two older music traditions: informal music-making at house parties, centered around concertinas or accordions, and well-organized and rehearsed town bands, which featured brass and

reeds. Still, today's Czech and German polka traditions remain distinct, and there are even further regional variations within each style.

Perhaps the quintessential German polka style is the sound developed by some key band leaders from New Ulm, Minnesota. Concertinist "Whoopee" John Wilfahrt and tuba blower Harold Loeffelmacher are the best known. In fact, their albums on the Polka City label might be the only American folk music recordings that are advertised on late night television. Loeffelmacher gave this style a name when he formed his influential Six Fat Dutchmen back in the 1930s. The Dutchmen sound builds on a rhythm section of drums, an occasional piano and a requisite romping tuba. On top is a sparkling melodic chorus of brass and reeds in ever-changing arrangements. Many Dutchmen blowers switch horns in the middle of a piece. Filling it all out are the improvisations of a concertinist.

While in other regional traditions, German bands are built around accordions, of both the piano and button-box varieties; the Dutchmen sound requires a concertina. One recognized master of this difficult instrument is Karl Hartwich, leader of the Country Dutchmen. A native of Orion, Illinois, he moved to southwestern Wisconsin to be closer to the distinctive sound that came out of America's Rhineland. In the words of folklorist Jim Leary, Karl's "playing is rapid, imaginative, full of exuberant feeling and inspired runs; his band responds in kind."¹

A very active musician, Karl plays about two hundred jobs every year, eighty percent of which are with his own band. The current Country Dutchmen lineup consists of Keith Reese, from near New Ulm, capitol of the Dutchmen sound, on keyboards; Wisconsinite Tony Kaminski on tuba; Holly Johnson, Karl's sister, on drums; and saxophonist Laurie Solberg, the multi-talented young daughter of band leader Wayne Solberg of LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

--by Paul L. Tyler

1. Jim Leary. 1988. Czech- and German-American Polka Music. *Journal of American Folklore* 101:343.

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