

## GL124 Folk Arts Survey of Waukegan & Zion, Illinois

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JE: The music that our, our parents brought over here was mostly folk music. In fact, our music comes from, let's say, Lebanon, where there was a lot of Armenians until the civil war over there. We call this 'hillbilly music'... You know they learned that in school, in grade school. I mean, they know all these songs. And a lot of them, when we play them, they'll come out just to be coming out. But they be, they rather us play these other song: the more up-to-date songs. They have a lot of jazz songs... All kinds of Armenian songs. I mean, there's all kinds of them, you can't believe that. There's volumes of books... and the modern Armenian he plays a lot of jazz, he plays a lot of upbeat songs, you know. It's no longer this hillbilly stuff that we play.

But when you go to picnics and dances, this is what they like, a lot of kids get in lines and they have a lot of fun. They really enjoy...

PT: The older stuff?

JE: Oh yea. Well, you saw them at that one wedding. They like to get out there... gives you a chance to do your thing, it its nothing, you know, you're out there acting.

See, I used to do a lot of dancing. I got tired of dancing. I used to get wringing wet. So I said, I'll take up a musical instrument. I won't perspire as much...

I started when I was about thirty-one... It was while I was courting my wife; and there was a guy in Racine who played the oud. His name was Abak. I used to go over to his house, you know, just to watch him. And I knew if I picked up an oud I could play it.

PT: Had you played any instrument before

JE: Well, I played the harmonica. And I had taken guitar lessons the old-fashioned way where you learn the notes and all that... I didn't get too far with that. I think I needed someone to get right into playing chords and singing songs, that was really what I should have had. That's the kind of lessons I wished I had taken.

...I think I have a pretty good ear for music, because I know over a hundred of these songs. One hundred and fifty maybe. In fact, I've forgotten probably more than I know now....

PT: so you knew you play the oud because you'e heard a lot of this music growing up?

JE: ...I just felt; yea, my dad used to sing some, some of these songs. I just, as soon as I picked up the oud, I; like there was one song called "Olan, Nolan," which is a Turkish song... I just know I could play the oud.... And there are a lot of Armenian, good Armenian oud players. There's some guys you knopw that just can play anything on there. It's amazing how they master it....

[The oud is common to Turks, Arabs, and Armenians. Jerry's was made in Istanbul by a maker named Karibian. He learned by watching others play.]

[On "Olan Nolan"] ...that was the first song I played. Everybody knew that one.

[Sark's band plays "both ways," both Armenian music and "wedding songs," that is American pop songs. Sark's playing uses a lot of improvisatory "runs." Some of the younger musicians don't play that way.]

PT: I wondered if Armenians carry a lot of political weight?

JE: ...It has nothing to do with being; see it's, it's individuals. Armenians are basically individualists.... You may think we're clannish. We're not...I mean, this town; here we have two churches, and uh, and most people don't even go to church. You go to the mall here and you see more Armenians standing around than you do at church....No, we're not a clannish group here, not in the United States. The new immigrants, yes, they're still clannish. But you give them another generation and us, through television, going to school, they'll lose quite a bit of their nationalism.

[Haig Paravonian is an example of an Armenian who didn't get involved. He's a Protestant who married a non-Armenian. He didn't go to weddings, didn't go to dances.]

JE: You know, he's not ashamed to be an Armenian, he's just never gotten involved....The new immigrants that have come here, are still clannish, but give them another generation they'll be just like; well, I shouldn't use me as an example because I am involved. Yet still, my thinking is, you know, I'll Americanize. I'm an American. I'm an Armenian, but I'm an American. You know what I mean. I've lived here all my life. I went to school here. You know, this is it...

One of the reasons we don't have a strong Armenian community here, is we didn't have any churches. We just built ours in 1959. So all those years you didn't have the indoctrination of going to Armenian church, going to Armenian school. Although they used to have Armenian school. They did have that, but not for many years. If we did have a church at the beginning, I think we would have had more of the Armenians, they'd be more aware of their nationality....They'd be more nationalist, let's put it that way....I mean they'd keep their identity more.