

## GL119 Folk Arts Survey of Waukegan & Zion, Illinois

### Julie Weakley

Waukegan, Illinois

May 22, 1987

#### 7) Julie Weakley (phone interview)

The American-Croatian Waukegan Tamburitzans have three performing groups and a beginners group. The beginners and Juniors rehearse on Sundays at 4:00. The adults follow at 6:30. The Dance group, for kids and teens, rehearses on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 8:15.

The Croatian Cultural Center has a fish fry every Friday, featuring Walleyed Pike and various ethnic and American foods. Julie has a combo, Just the Three of Us, that performs at the club on the first and third Fridays each month. They start at 7:00 and go until about 9:00 or 9:15, unless the crowd is real responsive; then they might play as late as 11:00. There is a jam session at the club on the second and fourth Fridays.

#### 8) Just the Three of Us - Tape # 87-1

(recorded at the Friday Fish Fry at the Croatian Cultural Center)

Julie Weakley - brac (e-a-d-g, 4th-1st) & vocal

Audrey Siwula - bugarija (d-g-b-d, 4th-1st) & vocal

Ryan Leosis - bass (subbing for Marty Berklan)

The Friday night dinners were prepared by a number of women in the back. Menu choices included Walleyed Pike, chicken, and Slovenian rice sausage. I ordered the latter. Julie and Audrey later asked me how I liked the blood sausage. Food orders are placed and paid for at a table in the meeting room staffed by two women. One wall of the meeting room features pictures of the Junior Orchestra and portraits of Charles Elias, their first teacher, and of young members of the group who were accepted into the Duquesne University Tamburitzans.

The trio performs on a low stage on the bar side of the Croatian Cultural Center. The TV was turned down (but not all the way, after all it was the Cubs game!) when the band started. They have a sound system with two vocal microphones for Julie and Audrey. Ryan also sang along, rather quietly, on some numbers, without the aid of a mic. Their instruments are unamplified.

The band started their set with several Croatian numbers, then played a series of American pop and ethnic standards, followed by more Croatian instrumentals and songs. For my benefit, they announced the names of some of the Croatian pieces. Julie left the bandstand several times to ask what I wanted them to play. I told them to do what they normally do. Still, they seemed to be a bit nervous about my presence.

The band received little response from the audience, except for the end of their first set, when one older man at the end of the bar began to make requests and sang along in Croatian. I left in the middle of the second set, because it did not appear that the band would play very late.

During their break, the band members sat at my table to talk. Julie's family background is Croatian. Audrey is Polish and German. Ryan, age fifteen loves tamburitza music, performing,

and other kinds of music. His favorite is Glenn Miller and "Midnight Serenade." Julie became interested in music when she was young and heard her mother sing in a Croatian chorus. About 15 years ago, she and her husband, Don, heard a tamburitza orchestra in some other city. It attracted their attention. They made some inquiries and discovered that Charles Elias, a renowned tamburasi from Racine, Wisconsin, was willing to teach and help establish a new group. The group started in 1972, thanks to a great deal of promotional effort, mostly by Don Weakley, a city alderman. Membership has ebbed and flowed in the intervening years. There are currently around fifty adults and children involved in a Senior Orchestra, a Junior Dance Group, a Junior Orchestra, and a Beginners Group. Currently, each group has a separate instructor. Julie teaches the folk dancers. This is the only tamburitza group in the world that owns their own building. Most orchestras are affiliated with churches or lodges. The Waukegan Tamburitians are self sufficient. Their big events include two concerts a year and a big picnic and music event in July, the Tam-Lamb-Jam.

## 2) American-Croatian Waukegan Tamburitians (Seniors rehearsal)

Julie Weakley and Audrey Siwula had invited me to bring my mandolin and sit in with the Senior Orchestra at rehearsal. I took them up on the offer in order to see how a rehearsal worked. I entered after they had already started. When they saw me, Julie asked if I had brought my mandolin, and then told the director, Joe Cvetkovic, that she had invited me to sit in. They found me a place between the first and second primms.

There were 14 women and two men at the rehearsal, besides the director. The women sat in two semi-circular rows. The three prim players sat at the left end of the first row, with the three brac players behind. Seven brac and cello players sat at the right side of the two rows. The one bugarija player sat in about the middle of the second row. The two men were playing basses. They stood behind the back row in the middle. The director, a much younger man, stood front and center, facing the players, with his back to the picture wall (see page 5). He had both a brac and a new European-style prim (tuned to play in E and B). He laid his instruments and cases on several tables along the picture wall.

Joe, the director called out the pieces to be played by a number written in the upper left hand corner of each sheet of music. The numbers ranged from single digits to about 150. No musicians notebook had a complete set of numbered pieces. Each member did have two notebooks: a red and a blue. There was a minimum of confusion over which notebook to look into, but I don't know what the system is. The director never had to refer to his music for numbers or notes. Nearly all the sheet music we played was from photocopies of manu scripts. Though none of the pieces seemed to be credited to a composer, many of sheets bore the name of the arranger. Most frequently the arranger was Charles Elias, the Racine tamburasi who was the first teacher of the Waukegan group.

The director, a local boy and former Duquesne University Tamburitian (and thus a hero), led the orchestra by playing. He gave cues with a little lift of the neck of his instrument. He constantly reminded the musicians to keep "eyes on my neck." The rehearsal proceeded through a mixture of slow and fast pieces, familiar songs requested by the members or suggested by Joe and new pieces that Joe wanted to work on. On only one song was there singing; it involved singing in both Croatian and English (the Croatian version of "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" with an English translation of the Croatian lyrics). There was a short meeting as the group

discussed possible times to hold events with other Chicago-area orchestras. What selections to play at upcoming public concerts was also discussed, but no decisions were made.

Joe broke up the playing to work on difficult strains, to work with separate sections of the orchestra, or to go over technical details (how to finger a certain phrase or how to phrase the tremelo of the pick). About midway through the rehearsal, he assigned a series of noting exercises working on fingering three, four, or five notes on a single string. Several exercises also worked on tremelo with the pick. At one point, each individual had to perform the exercise alone. Shyness reigned.

In general, the orchestra has five sections: prim, brac, cello, bugarija, and bass. The prim parts are generally a full octave higher than the brac parts. On some pieces, the sections are divided into two or three parts. In such arrangements, the melody line jumps back and forth between the various parts.

Some of the members have received the first real music training in their lives through the tamburitza group. The organization runs a beginner's group to help people get started reading music and learning to play a stringed instrument. All the members own their own instruments. Most were purchased from a maker who lives in Pennsylvania. The current prices for new instruments ranges from \$250 for a prim to \$450 for a brac or cello.

June 12

### 3) Croatian Cultural Center/Julie Weakley

The 2nd (and the 4th) Friday of each month is jam session at the club's weekly fish fry. On this evening, however, the regular "bug" (bugarija, a 4-stringed rhythm instrument) player called to say he wouldn't show up. The jam session was officially called off. Three young boys who had brought their instruments went outside to do some playing. Their session didn't last long, apparently because they didn't have music notebooks, and no adults had brought any.

I sat and talked with Julie Weakley. She looked at transcriptions of some of the songs I had taped on May 15 and supplied titles. She had trouble thinking of the names for a few of the songs. Ryan Leosis, one of the frustrated young players, helped out. She also asked a woman working in the kitchen, who spoke very little English.

Julie leads the Tamburitza's Junior folk dance group. The three young boys who came prepared to play this Friday are also very dedicated dancers. They, unlike some others in the group, do their homework from week to week: e.g. working on a step or learning the lyrics to a song. Another boy, a tall, gangly teenager who was working in the kitchen for the fish fry, is also a dedicated dancer, even though a previous teacher for the group had dismissed him as lacking in ability. The dance group gives several performances a year in Waukegan, as well as traveling to events sponsored by other Croatian tamburitza and folk dance groups. The dancers have a performance coming up in about a week.

June 17

### 5) American-Croatian Waukegan Tamburitza's/Junior Folk Dance Group

The folk dance group practices every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 8:15. Twelve kids, four boys and eight girls, were at this rehearsal. That is slightly over half of the group. The range in ages was from six years old to about 15 or 16.

The first part of the rehearsal was spent working on "kolos," social dances performed in closed and open circles that the kids will dance along with adults as part of the informal dancing that follows most formal programs. Julie Weakley teaches the social dances to music from records. The second half of the rehearsal was devoted to working on a set performance piece, a medley of various old-country dances choreographed for a stage. These dances involve more complex foot-work than the social dances. The choreography features a variety of closed and open circles, lines, and couple moves; building on, but going beyond the kinds of floor patterns found in social dancing. This part of the rehearsal was run by Lynn Berklan and Nancy Laine, two young women (both are school teachers) who had been in the group only a few years before.

The dance group had lost their teacher this year. Julie Weakley had enlisted the help of Lynn and Nancy to reconstruct and teach a performance routine the group had done in the past. The standard seems to be for such dance groups to come up with a new routine every year. These are usually made up by the teacher hired by the group.

The Waukegan dancers perform several times a year in the Waukegan area. The Tamburitza group present at least one major performance each year for the community at large. This year they performed at the Genessee Theatre. They also hold the "Tam-Lamb-Jam" (a large picnic) each year, primarily for the Croatian community, to which a number of other Tamburitza groups are invited. In addition, the dance group and the orchestras travel to Croatian "folklore" events held elsewhere in the Chicago area, and to one big national Tamburitza gathering each year.