

Ethnic Dance Music in Northern Indiana

Jerry Kurdys' Polka Party

IH212 South Bend - April 20, 1987. Polish songs & dance music.

Jerry Kurdys (drums-lead vocals), Tom Williams (clarinet) Gene Mikolajewski (trumpet-vocals), David Levendoski (concertina) & Ken Berzai (accordion-organ)

Dyngus Day celebration at Mike Berta's Place, a bar; recorded by Paul L. Tyler

Dyngus Day, the Monday after Easter, is a Polish calendar custom that has become a city-wide holiday in South Bend, Indiana. It's a day for people--especially those with blue-collar jobs--to skip work and spend the day drinking, eating, dancing, and celebrating. The other focus of Dyngus Day is political. Candidates come out on Dyngus Day to meet the people. With a mayoral primary two weeks away, Dyngus Day 1987 was a particularly important campaign opportunity for the two front runners in a field of five Democratic candidates: Richard Jasinski and Joe Kearney, whose names accurately reflect their ethnic identities. Mr. Jasinski had the support of the fifty to sixty people who crowded into Mike Berta's Place on South Bend's heavily Polish west side. Mr. Kearney also made an appearance at the party, but he was kept in the shadows (where the only person he could talk to was the fellow from IU-Bloomington who was tape recording the band). He had twenty more appearances to make that day, mostly on the west side; but ethnic solidarity notwithstanding, Mr. Kearney was the eventual winner of the primary election.

The celebration at Mike Berta's Place began officially at 10:00 A.M. when Jerry Kurdys' Polka Party took the stage, a small riser at the east end of the room. After a few numbers and several pauses to correct technical problems, the band went on the air with a live, remote broadcast on WAMJ (1580 AM), the radio station where Jerry Kurdys spins polka records for two hours early each weekday morning. The live broadcast was sponsored by State Farm Insurance and Richard Jasinski's campaign committee. The music and paid ads, spoken by Jerry Kurdys and Gene Mikolajewski, lasted until noon with only one short break. Then Jerry cut loose with more polkas and a series of ribald, humorous songs that demanded audience participation. Several couples of various ages also got up to dance in the small open area by the entrance to the bar and on the sidewalk out through the open front door.

At 1:00 P.M. Jerry Kurdys' Polka Party broke down their equipment to make room for the Brass Sunset. The Polka Tops with Jim DeKa would take over at 6:00. There was hardly any room left in Mike Berta's Place by noon, but I was told that more people would crowd in: "By 5:00 you won't be able to see the band." Jerry Kurdys' group had two more places to play that day: the University [a club by that name, Notre Dame, or IU-South Bend?] and M.R. Falcon's, "where it will be real big."

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