

Music A Big Part of Silver Lake & McLeod County's Heritage

In this column, I am pleased to reprint a fine article on the history of music in McLeod County, Minnesota, that was researched and written by the late Ellie Makovsky (1935-1999).

"Music has been an important part of life in the Czech, Slovak and other middle European countries for hundreds of years. In Silver Lake, McLeod County, Minnesota, music has continued generation after generation to this day. The Czech and Polish immigrants who settled in Silver Lake starting in 1858 had packed a precious concertina or violin to accompany them on the four to eight week voyage to the New World.

These early immigrants worked very hard and they played hard as their descendants still do. They made their own good times by starting religious services in their homes, the whole family getting together with neighbors, relatives and friends they knew in the old country. This is when the concertina or violin (fiddle) would come out to accompany the folk songs, waltzes, and polkas of their home country. (Of course, the polka was invented in the Czech lands, the word "pulka" meaning half step, later was changed to "polka."

Before 1910, music was sung, played and danced to with their families and friends at home or when visiting. Later on, a piano or wind instruments were added. In 1914, Frank Kolar, Sr. had a one man band, playing 13 instruments at once. As buggies, wagons and roads were improved and later when automobiles were more common, people went longer distances to get together after a long day's work to have fun with others at house parties, weddings and later barn dances. Some popular meeting places were the dancing halls above the city hall, Totusek's store and Bohemian Hall between Silver Lake and Hutchinson where they also had plays, operas, and bands.

In the 1920's people traveled to the Swan Lake Pavilion or Lake Marion Pavilion which were unheated. Sherman Station near Winsted was another spot. They went in their Model A or touring care before electricity or radio and it was good clean fun. The men paid 15 to 25 cents for admission and their dates got in free. Outdoors there was a concession stand selling hot dogs, pop (Orange Crush and root beer) and candy bars.



The Silver Lake Concert Band, Carver County Fair, date unknown.

From 1922 to 1926, a Community Band of 30-38 men was organized in Silver Lake under the sponsorship of the American Legion. They looked sharp in their white uniforms and caps. Leaders of the band were Frank Kolar, Jr. and Art Lunow who also played. Some of the others were George Kasper, A.J. Horejsi,

Frank Bandas, Joe Pesina, George Miskovsky, Dr. Dressel, Art Kuhlmann, Joe Stibal, W.O. Merrill, Clarence Vorlicek, Jim Ziska, Bernie Stibal, Joe Osinek, Ed Totusek, Adolph Yukel, Henry Navratil, Henry Jerabek, Theophil Jerabek, Frank Chalupsky, Walter Lueck, Peter Stibal, Ed Streachek, George Pesina, Robert Jerabek, Frank Stibal, and Ernest Stibal.

They played every Thursday from spring to fall in the Silver Lake park bandstand and people surrounded the park with horse and buggies and Model A's and touring cars to listen. The band traveled to Virginia, Minnesota to receive the first place award for the State of Minnesota.

Stibal's Band was organized in the 1920's and played into the 1930's for barn dances in Frank Stibal's barn. Bernie Stibal played trombone and tuba, Alice Stibal piano, Joe Stibal clarinet, Frank Stibal trumpet, Ernest Stibal drums and later Peter Stibal played the bass horn.

In 1929, Trnka, Lapour and Konerza had a three piece band for a few years playing violin and concertina. O'Henry's Band played from 1929-1941 with Henry Svoboda playing concertina, Bernie Stibal bass horn, Harry Mahs trombone, Henry (Heiny) Mahs drums, Otto (Slim) Mackdanz sax and Howard Peterson piano. They played at the Swan Lake and Lake Marion Pavilion, house parties, barn dances and at the C.S.P.S. Hall in St. Paul, John Barto, his wife and sons also had a five piece band during this era, playing mostly for house parties.

The Syncopated Kolaches played four to five years in the early 1930's with Charley Novak on clarinet and sax, Everett Totusek banjo, Ray Chalupsky drums, Leroy Pishney trumpet, Henry Burich trumpet, Mr. Krejci bass horn, and Gladys Smoley piano. They traveled in Ray Chalupsky's big Buick.

Henry Klima's Orchestra played from 1933-1941. Henry Klima played accordion, George Gould played three clarinets (at once!), Jay Gould, Jr. trumpet, Dooley Holtz of Brownton, the sax, and Bill Lang of Arlington, the bass horn. Later on, Henry Klima played accordion, Irvin Burich sax and clarinet, Ed Klima drums, Jim Snegoski trumpet, Charley Novak sax and clarinet, Bernie Stibal bass horn, and Grace Svoboda piano. After World War II, Henry played with the Minnesota Derby Band, Jerry Dostal Band, the Wally Pikal Band for 14 years and then by himself.

"Happy Bill" Makovsky played concertina for many years in the 1940's and 1950's locally.

The Jerry Dostal Orchestra started in 1930 after growing up with his immigrant father playing accordion and brothers Burt, Matt, George, Frank and Jerry and sister Sophie as members of the "Midway Melody Six." During the depression, they played for a percentage of the gate. When the weather was bad and the attendance small, they played without pay. The first members of Jerry Dostal's own orchestra were Burt Dostal sax, Donald Smutka trombone, Charley Novak sax and clarinet, LeRoy Pishney trumpet, Rudy Witthus concertina, Bernie Stibal bass horn, Everett Totusek banjo and guitar, Jerry Dostal drums, and later, after they were married in 1934, Jerry's wife, Ethel, played piano for six years. The players received \$5 a night and could buy a full meal for "two bits" (25 cents). They first traveled in an eight passenger DeSoto pulling a trailer for instruments, then he customized a panel truck and finally a sleeper bus. They started playing live radio broadcasts in Minneapolis, Willmar, Ames, Iowa; and Yankton, South Dakota. They played in large ballrooms in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa including the Prom Ballroom in St. Paul, Gladys Ballroom in Montevideo and the Tarp Ballroom in Austin, often playing seven days a week.



THE ORIGINAL (FIRST) BAND Front row: L.-R.: Burt Dostal, Charley Novak, Donald Smutka, LeRoy Pishney, Everett Totushek
Back row: L.-R.: Bernie Stibal - Bass; Jerry Dostal, Randy Withus - Concertina

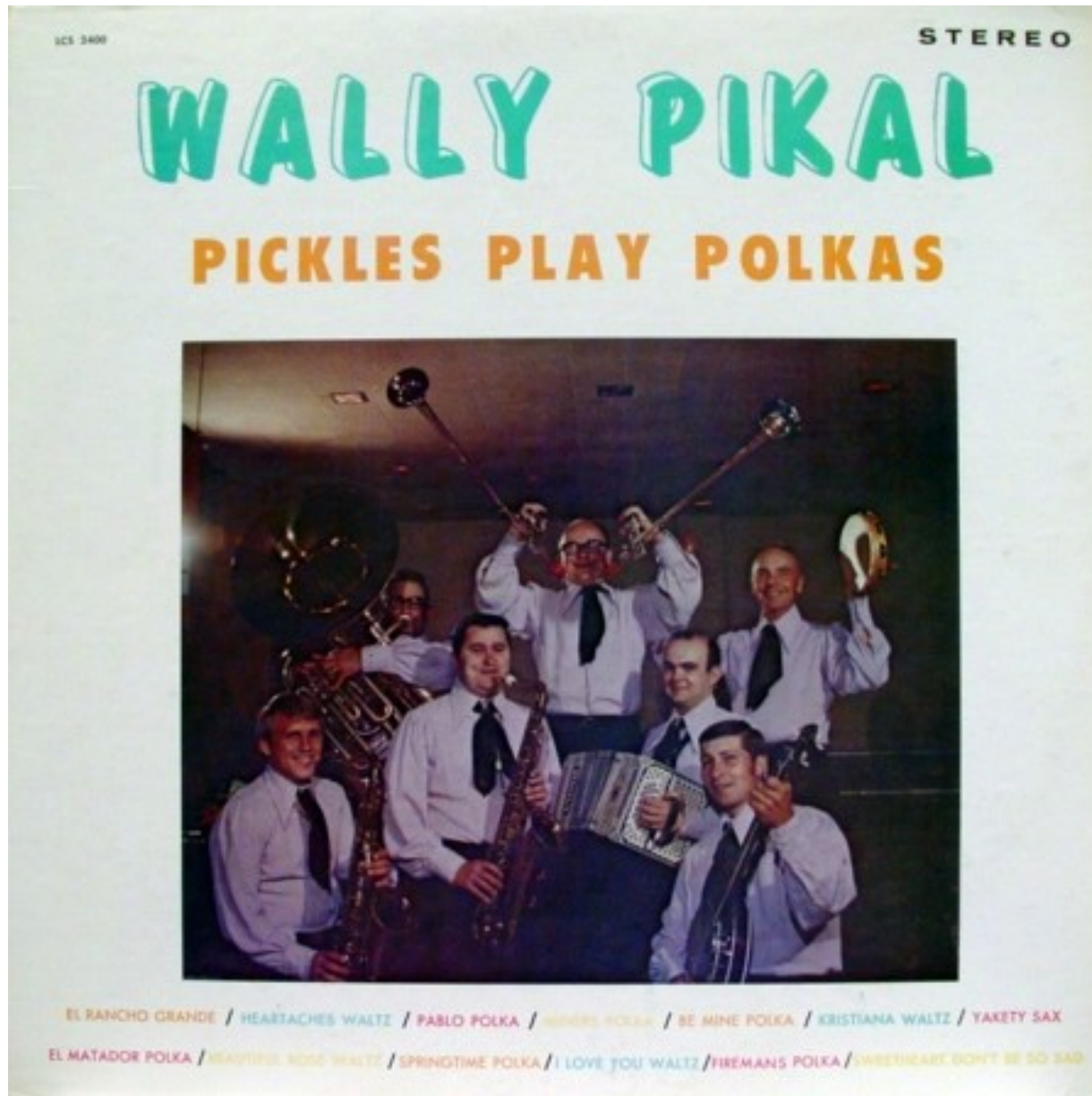
Jerry moved the Swan Lake Pavilion to the south shore of Silver Lake in 1940 and built it into the Pla-Mor Ballroom. This orchestra disbanded in 1943 when he left to serve his country. When he returned in 1946, after a few months with demands, he started a second band consisting of Charley Kolpek on bass horn, Ray Stibal sax and clarinet, Wally Pikal trumpet, Roy Pikal trombone, Pat Roberts accordion, Vlasta (Val) Dostal piano and Jerry on drums. They played together until 1955. Their first recording in 1948 was "Pla-Mor Waltz" on 78 RPM and then many recordings which were later transferred to LP albums and then to cassettes. Some years later, Jerry played with the Six Fat Dutchmen for a year, then with the Elmer Scheid and Jerry Schuft Bands. Then he formed the Jerry Dostal Trio, playing for weddings, in clubs, and parades.

A Heritage of Music



JERRY DOSTAL BAND L.-R.: Ethel Dostal, LeRoy Pishney, Rodney Harkman, Walter Birkstrand, Everett Totushek, Eddie Munson, Jerry Dostal

The Wally Pikal Orchestra started on Easter Sunday of 1950 with Henry Klima accordion, Roy Pikal trombone and sax, Myron Beckman trumpet, Calvin West bass horn, Jerry Durand drums, Wally Pikal trumpet and sax, and his wife, Alice, piano. In those years, the players got \$12 per night. Over the years, Ray Stibal played sax, Henry Klima accordion, Charley Kolpek bass horn, Marinus Fasching sax, Jerry Kadlec 12 years on the sax, Marvin Bulau 18 years on concertina, Warren Will, Bob Buscher, LeRoy Wilkins, and Leo Presinger. They played all the big ballrooms in central and southern Minnesota and Iowa, including the Prom Ballroom in St. Paul, Marigold, Majestic, Bel Rae, and Medina. In 1982, the band changed to a trio including Wally Pikal trumpet, Harvey Becker accordion and Wayne Welch drums.



In 1955, Wally Pikal started playing three trumpets at the same time while jumping on a pogo stick. He appeared on the Johnny Carson show in 1976 and on the Mike Wallace show in 1976 and 1980. In the

1970's the band made three trips to Hawaii and four trips to Texas playing in Czech settlements in the south. Later Wally Pikal, Bruce Bradley and his wife Meg Bradley formed a trio.

In the early 1950's, Harry Jerabek's Band played wedding dances and Saturday dances. Harry Jerabek was on drums, Jerry Kolpek trumpet, Lanny Taylor trumpet, Jerry Kadlec sax, Joan Kadlec trumpet, Jack Picha trumpet, Alice Nowak accordion or sax, Sharon Taylor sax and Luana Taylor sax. They received \$5 per night and the band received \$70 per evening.

In 1960 Bill Makovsky, Jr. started the Wee Willie Band which is still playing and selling records and cassettes.

The Jolly Czechs formed by Gene Streachek played in the 1980's and 1990's. Dan Totushek and son Dean still play accordion and bass.

We, in the McLeod County area, are very proud of each of the musicians and the rich heritage we have continued by playing, enjoying, singing, and dancing to their music.”

By Ellie Makovsky, Silver Lake Leader, August 29, 1996

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

hudba ('HUHD-bah') - music

píseň ('PEE-seneh') – song

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

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