



NEWSLETTER OF THE  
**SAN FRANCISCO**

**BAY AREA ACCORDION CLUB**

Editors: Marian Kelly  
Dominic Palmisano

## OCTOBER MEETING

President **Peter Di Bono** opened the meeting with a little business, as usual. First he reminded everyone that those who haven't yet paid dues won't receive newsletters. Even though our total membership is already about 200 strong, we hate to lose any of you. Please send us your dues, or let us know why not!

**Peter** spoke for the BAAC Page editors, **Marian** and **Dominic**, in requesting items for publication from any of you. Please send us current newsworthy items, accor-

dion memorabilia items, anything biographical, and, perhaps most important, your opinions about the Club. (See Across the Editor's Desk in this issue.)

Then we settled in for some unusual entertainment. First, **Domenic Saso** introduced his student, nine-year old **Blake Parker**, who has taken lessons for all of two months. **Blake** played "Batter Up", "Jingle Bells", and "Indian Pow-Wow" very authoritatively and with wonderful stage presence. A little later, we were introduced to ten-

year old **John Schoenberger**, who rolled through "Beer Barrel Polka" with his teacher, **Clyde Forsman**, and then "Barbara Polks" by himself. What a delight it was to listen to these two boys play and to observe their own pleasure and satisfaction.

Meantime, we heard **Brian Heggen** from San Jose, a new face in our crowd. **Brian** composes his own music, and although we didn't catch the names of the two pieces he

*Continued on Page 2*

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**October 13th to 18th** An accordion extravaganza, with the general theme of Accordions Around the World, held at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. The highlight will be an accordion ball – including Afro-Tex music, polka, waltz, Dominican merengue, and Puerto Rican bomba – on October 17th at 8 P.M. Call the Exploratorium Events line at 415-561-0361.

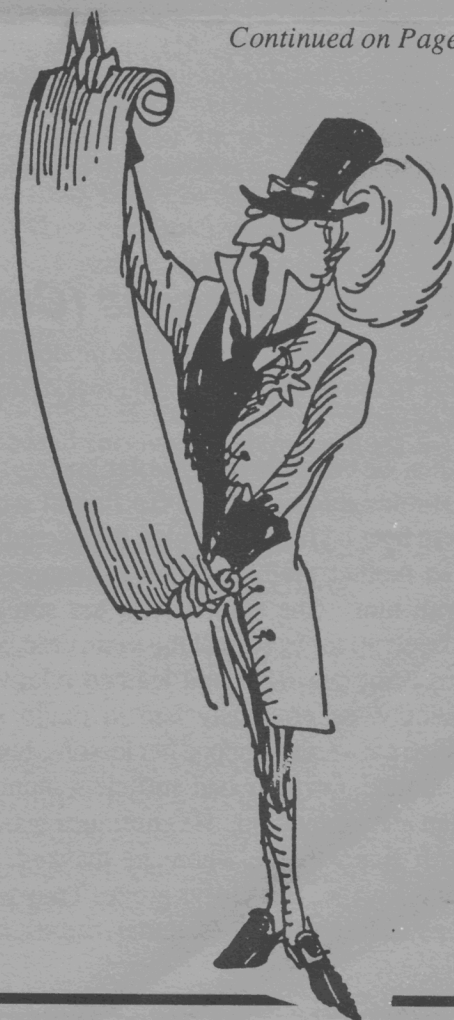
**October 24th, 25th.** The Second Annual San Francisco International Accordion Festival. Anchorage Shopping Center, 2800 Leavenworth. Featuring the Ms. Accordion San Francisco Pageant, Steve Shen and the Shenettes, Sourdough Slim, Marko Bubalo, Zydeco Flames, Sue Hinkle's Bavarian Polka Dance Troupe, Jim Boggio and the Gypsy Jazzers, Salut Matelot, Los Pinkys, Motor Dude Zydeco, Josef Brinkmann & the Conspiracy of Equals, Those Dam Accordions!, and Jim Boggio's Sonoma Swamp Dogs. From 11:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. both days.

**October 27, Tuesday.** BAAC Board Meeting at Frank Montoro's. 574-4757.

**November 2nd., Monday.** Bay Area Accordion Club's November General Meeting, at the usual place, usual time. BAAC's new t-shirts will be available for purchase. Other wonderful happenings unknown at press time.

**March 26 to April 4, 1993.** International Accordion Celebration, sponsored by the city of Toronto, Canada and the Classical Accordion Society of Canada. We quote

*Continued on Page 4*



## TOM'S TANTALIZING TIDBITS

In response to a Letter to the Editor that I wrote a while back, I was challenged to put my computer where my mouth was. So, I am pleased to let you all know that I am going to be writing a monthly column for the Club's newsletter. The focus of the column will be on what's going on in the world of accordions locally, nationally, and internationally. Of course, I will be happy to include scandalous information and my personal views on accordion related subjects. If there is something else you would like to see in this catch-all column, give me a call. I also plan for this column to be interactive. That is, I will pose questions to which you can respond. The results of these polls should prove to be enlightening and fun to read.

So, we begin. I have decided there are now only two types of bands in the world; those with an accordion player and those who wish they had an accordion player.

As you know, coming up October 24th and 25th is The Second Annual San Francisco International Accordion Festival. As the Director of Publicity for the festival, I was asked to come up with some new twist to generate interest. My idea was an accordion recital showcasing the next generation of accordionists. From what I can determine, there is *no* next generation of accordionists. I was only able to come up

with two students to perform (thanks to Clyde and Mr. Cirelli). This is not good. I think a concerted effort needs to be put forth extolling the virtues of playing the accordion and marketing that information to schools. The Club could be a clearinghouse for students. Sort of a 1-800-TEACHER. The Club could refer students to teachers in their respective areas. Lord knows this club does not suffer from a lack of qualified teachers. Perhaps a brochure could be written and disseminated to all the schools. Couldn't hurt. Also, with the Club sponsoring this, it's a good way to get the word out about the Club and as a result, generate new memberships.

I just found out that next June (National Accordion Awareness Month) there's going to be a dedication in L.A. over the opening of the first open space park in that city since the '30s. One of the organizers of the event called me to say they are planning on doing an accordion parade as part of the festivities because the accordion is *the* representative instrument for all the various cultural and ethnic groups down in the southland..and also because it's N.A.A.M. P.S. Next June is the 5th anniversary of NAAM!

I see the Five Valley Accordion Club (Missoula, MT) held a campout recently

and have a bus trip and another campout coming up (in conjunction with the Northwest Accordion Club), where in addition to tons of great food there's lots of accordion playing. Maybe we should have a special events committee to plan some fun excursions for us.

I see Ron Flynn and Co. just published a revised copy of their Golden Age of the Accordion. I wonder if we can get the new one at a reduced rate if we can prove we bought the old one? Call Ron and find out at 415-751-6081.

The new Chicken Boy Catalog is out. (Finally). In addition to its normal array of weird and tacky stuff, they're carrying TDA's tape (Yeah!) and aother assorted accordion related stuff. Need a catalog? Call Amy at 1-800-422-0505. Amy's a member of FOTA and Chicken Boy, of course, plays the accordion.

Tom Torriglia

Ed. Note. Tom's renowned group, Those Darn Accordions!, left town October 4th bound for Lithuania. We trust he'll bring back pictures of Soviets dancing to TDA's music with big grins on their faces, similar to the Happening at Cotati. Stay tuned for next month's column!

## OCTOBER MEETING (CONTINUED)

played, they were wonderfully modernistic, and Brian played them with great style and feeling.

Then we met Othmar Stubler and his trio. Othmar told us stories, the first of which was how he learned to play the accordion. His mother motivated him by competing with him. She signed both her son and herself up for lessons at the same time, and, since she practiced and learned relatively quickly, he obviously had to outdo her. After a year, she stopped her lessons, but by that time, Othmar had sufficient momentum and motivation. He continued lessons with Reno Pucci, whom he thanked, for quite a while. Back to his group. They were outstanding with vibes, guitar, drums, har-

monica, accordion, and Othmar's vocals being used in a very effective way. Some of their numbers were "Volare", "Singing in the Rain", "Tico-Tico", "Under Paris Skies", "Pennsylvania Polka", "Besame Mucho", "Mack the Knife", "Misty", "Brazil", and "Quando Quando". After a great deal of applause, the crowd finally let them break for intermission.

After intermission Ted Varga wowed everyone with a couple of polkas followed by "Lara's Theme". Ted is a great crowd pleaser because of his love for the accordion, which is so very obvious when he plays. Val Ballerini followed by playing and singing several numbers including "Oh, Marie" and "Eh Cumpari".

Val announced that he and his group would be performing at Ghiradelli Square on October 10th.

Stanley Pecavar next performed beautifully on a diatonic accordion, even doing glissandos with his right hand.

Frank Panacci completed the program with a beautiful medley which included "Twilight Time" and "I'm in the Mood for Love", his own arrangement of "Twelfth Street Rag", and "Lichtensteiner Polka". We always look forward to hearing Frank play, because he makes those wonderful sounds look so easy. Thank you, Frank, for concluding so competently another delightful meeting.

Barb Hartley





## IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH BIVIANO (1908-1992)

On September 4th the music community lost one of its most innovative and talented accordionists as well as one of its finest teachers, Mr. Joe Biviano. His accomplishments include being the staff accordionist for NBC Radio and Television in New York City, having his own radio program, and playing the accordion as a regular member of the New York Metropolitan Opera Company. Joe collaborated with important composers who wrote works for the accordion. Also, he formed the Accordion Symphony Society of New York, which performed under his baton throughout the New York Metropolitan area, including Carnegie Hall. He was a fine composer and arranger who brought the accordion to high levels of professionalism and respect.

Joe was my teacher from the time I was thirteen years old until my early twenties, and more than musical knowledge, he provided me with guidance about my education, helped me launch my career as a musician, and served as a mentor and sometimes even as a second father. And I'm just one of many students whose lives he profoundly affected. I'm going to miss him very much.

Jerry Kramer

October 12, 1992  
Belmont, CA

Dear Peter Di Bono:

I'm writing to you because of a need to express my opinion about the location of the San Francisco Accordion Club meetings. The club has risen in popularity throughout the Bay Area and now is the time to take a serious look at our facilities. There are five major areas of concern that need to be addressed.

1. Although the location is beneficial for most members in attendance, the neighborhood does not feel safe at night.
2. The parking is limited. It's not possible to arrive a few minutes early and find a space.
3. The interior of the site is of the cow barn category. The location of the bathrooms to the stage creates no feeling of privacy and discreteness. That alone is a major consideration for relocating.
4. Although the hall size fits our needs very well, the acoustics are terrible. Again, this issue alone is good enough reason to look for a new home.
5. Understanding that a front door to a location is very incidental – you can even say it's ridiculous to bring it up – but this particular door is the exception. "The Door" epitomizes the whole ambiance of the meeting regardless of who is performing.

My suggestion would be to look for a new location which would appeal to the majority of members. Also, we need to place ourselves in a community where we can attract new members. It would be wonderful if we could find a place where local residents would come to our song-fest evenings. Also, we would be able to influence the children just by our presence in their neighborhood.

I would greatly appreciate your efforts in addressing these issues.

Sincerely,

Jean Pierre Pagola  
415-591-4738

***The bellows is the heart and soul  
of the accordion; think of it as  
such. Don't just push and pull.***

—Anthony Galla-Rini

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS (CONTINUED)

from their brochure: "The dates March 26 to April 4, 1993 are to become the most crucial historical dates in the saga of modern day classical accordion. On these dates, an impressive tri-part event is being held in Toronto. The International Accordion Celebration consists of 12 concerts in a festival atmosphere, congress workshops and demonstrations, as well as a competition showcasing the talents of our many advanced, international young artists."

Evening concerts which feature accordion performers Hugo Noth, Matti Rantanen, Miny Dekkers, Mogens Ellegaard, Joseph Marcerollo, and Friedrich Lips are scheduled nightly. The second weekend adds afternoon concerts, with a grand finale on April 4th which includes the world premier of Jesper Koch's "Accordion Concerto," the North American premiere of Ole Schmidt's "Chamber Concerto," Alexina

Louie's "Refuge for Accordion," and R. Murray Schafer's "La Testa D'Adriane." After all that, there will be a concert by the competition winners and presentations. Inexpensive packages are available. For more info, contact Marian at (415) 854-1896, or write to International Accordion Celebration; Joseph Macerollo, Artistic Director; 3296 Cindy Crescent; Mississauga, Ontario L4Y3J6.





## SQUEEZING OUT A PROFIT



Did everyone read the October 8th edition of *The Marin Independent Journal*? What a gorgeous spread they ran on our famous accordion salesman and repairman, Gordon Piatanesi! Page one had a 5"x6" picture of Gordon with a great grin holding a lovely white accordion with "Colombo" emblazoned thereon. The picture was titled "Squeezing Out a Profit", and it referred to the larger story on the business page.

Inside was another large color photo, this time of Bob Ballestrazze repairing an accordion. Accompanying the photo was a column by *Independent Journal* business columnist Nick Hoppe from which we quote liberally below:

I was leafing through the *Marin Yellow Pages*, looking for the number of an accountant I knew. What I found was a classic example of small business survival.

There it was, all by itself, under the lonely heading of ACCORDIONS: "Colombo & Sons Accordions Inc. Sales and Service since 1907. 1201 Andersen Dr., San Rafael".

My first thought was of Lawrence Welk, the famous band leader and accordion lover. He probably would have been a customer. Unfortunately, Mr. Welk died earlier this year. Surely that must have killed the accordion market once and for all.

My curiosity aroused, I dropped by Colombo & Sons the next morning. Gordon Piatanesi, 65, grandson of founder Colombo Piatanesi (1907 marketing surveys suggested his first name was easier to pronounce) greeted me as

I walked in.

I quickly glanced around, expecting to see other instruments or products for sale besides accordions. Nope, just accordions.

Boxes ready for shipping were near the door. There wasn't a cobweb in sight.

"What's your secret of survival?" I asked.

"Well, it helps to not have much competition," replied Piatanesi.

That made sense. When you read the business magazines' hot new start-up ideas for the '90s, rarely do they suggest the accordion business.

The company, amazingly, is a viable one, proving that there is a market niche for almost any product. Of course, it helps to have opened your doors in 1907, giving you 85 years to carve that niche.

...But while the company is surviving, it is hardly booming. The accordion market, even before the death of Welk, has not been the same since the 1950s.

"Elvis killed us," said Piatanesi. "He started jumping around with that guitar, and that was it. The accordion still hasn't recovered."

Colombo & Sons used to sell more than 50 accordions a month. Now it's down to about 15. With accordions priced from as low as \$300 to a high of \$10,000, Piatanesi expects to gross about \$500,000 this year.

"We're doing all right," he said. "We get to eat steak every once in a while."

Still, it's not like the old days. Until 1952, Colombo & Sons had 18 employ-

ees and manufactured its own accordions in a factory in San Francisco's North Beach. It was just one of eight accordion factories in the neighborhood.

Now all the manufacturing is done overseas. Colombo contracts with factories in mainland China, Germany, and (naturally) Italy to produce its accordions. Eighty percent of the \$300,000 inventory carries the Colombo name.

In the showroom, a wide variety of colorful accordions are on display. Piatanesi picked up a \$5,000 model and proceeded to show me the versatility of the instrument.

By pushing buttons, he could shift from the "Italian tuning" to the "French tuning" to the "dry sound" (American).

"Do you hear the change in bravado?" he asked when he switched back to the French.

He was asking the wrong guy. "Absolutely," I lied.

I asked Piatanesi about the future of the accordion business.

"Our sales have increased slightly every year for the past 10 years," he said. "I think it will be fine."

They've probably said the same thing every year for 85 years at Colombo & Sons. Perhaps in another 50 years grandson Mark Piatanesi, 9, will be saying future business will be fine. Colombo & Sons and accordions have indeed survived. Lawrence Welk may rest in peace.

Congratulations, Gordon! What a wonderful tribute to you and Gloria.

## FESTA ITALIANA

Everyone was Italian the weekend of October 3rd, everyone who was at Pier 35 for the Fiesta, that is. This year the event surpassed all previous years. Michael Gallette, co-ordinator of the festivities, sends his warmest thank yous to the San Francisco Bay Area Accordion Club for the generous support in providing the strolling accordion music. Special mentions for Lou Casalnuovo, Dan Cooper, Bill Demichelis, Clyde Forsman, Barbara Hartley, Don Nurisso, Dominic Palmisano, Reno Pucci, Bob Smith, Lou Soper, Cindy Tuculet, and Lee Woodall - YOU WERE ALL SUPERB. Five hundred thank yous for generously sharing of your time and talent!

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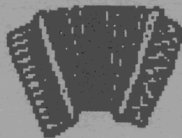
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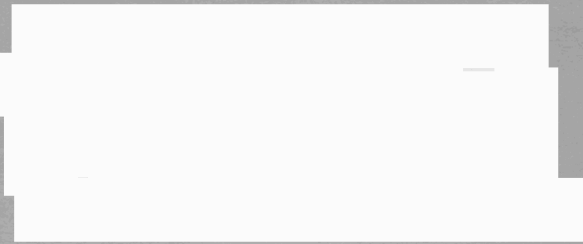
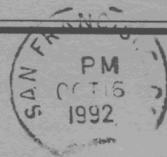
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