

CAPA TIMES



*The Official Newsletter
of Closet Accordion
Players of America*

SUMMER 2006

CRYING "UNCLE"

Cheri Thurston

In the last issue, I told all you loyal subscribers that we were going to produce only one more issue of the CAPA Times. My goodness, but did we receive nice notes from so many of you! It seems that CAPA members do not want the newsletter to end.

So...we're crying "uncle," sort of. After discussing it with my staff at length, we have decided that we will continue to produce one issue a year, to come out in February or March. That is a slow time for us, and it should allow advertisers and promoters of summer accordion events to have a way to reach CAPA members.

We also realized that what drives us craziest is keeping the subscription information up-to-date. So—we're going to send it out free, once a year. Anyone who has a current subscription will go on our permanent list. Any other CAPA member who would like to receive the free newsletter need only ask. To be sure you are on the permanent list, just email us and let us know (cottonwood@cottonwoodpress.com), call us (1-800-864-4297), or mail us a note. We want to send issues only to members who really want them, so let us know if you wish to continue receiving the once-a-year newsletter.

For those of you who have paid to renew, we will apply your money to printing and mailing the future issues. (If you prefer to have a pro-rated refund, let us know.)



WEDDING MUSIC. I have been up to my neck in accordion music for the past couple of months. My niece

wants me to play the accordion for her wedding ceremony in August so I've been going through my huge stacks and stacks of music, as well as trying out new things.

Finally, I narrowed the music down to 16 selections. I made a chart for the bride and groom, listing each song with a place to mark "Yes," "Maybe," "No," and "Over My Dead Body." Then, after feeding the couple dinner and a bit of wine, we went out to my studio, and I played a bit of each selection. I told them they couldn't consult with one another but had to mark their selections separately. I also gave my husband a chart.

The good news is that the bride marked only one song as "Over My Dead Body." That was the Wedding March. I wasn't surprised, as this is a young woman who definitely does things her own way. (For example, she's participating in a 25-mile mountain bike race, with her fiancé, the morning of the wedding. Her mother is not pleased.)

Interestingly, the bride and groom (and my husband) made almost exactly the same "Yes" choices. Three out of the four numbers they selected for the wedding are pieces from David DiGiuseppe's books or web site, or music he has been kind enough to send me. (Check out his web site at www.daviddg.com. You can hear samples and even download some sheet music.) I love playing his work, and—luckily—they loved it, too!

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THE MUSIC MAN AND HIS MAGIC BOX

by Maryjo Faith Morgan

Some people are simply always on the invitation list, no matter what the occasion. They just seem to “make” a party, and so it was with Mary and Nick. Ours is a boisterous family—Scotch, English, and Irish on one side, full blooded Italian on the other. Great food, spirited discussions, and celebrating at any little excuse is the norm. Beyond the usual birthdays, First Communions, promotions or funerals, there are gatherings for a new car, surviving poison ivy or being accepted to college.

Aunt Mary and Uncle Nick made any gathering a toe-tapping, song-singing party that people talked about for ages. Ulterior motives became apparent to me that went beyond Aunt Mary’s good cooking and delicious desserts. There was only one reason everyone wanted them at their party: The truth is, Nicholas Benedetto played a mean accordion.

Known professionally as Nick Bennett, he was a self-taught musician playing a hand-me-down instrument, who took advantage of whatever opportunities that came his way. Solo or in a combo, he also worked as a background musician for radio stations, constantly striving for perfection and proficiency. Even after 20 years in the business, he grabbed at the chance to study with Andy Arcari, one of the most accomplished accordionists of the last century. Nick made his living in the Philadelphia area teaching music lessons and providing live entertainment for weddings, bar mitzvahs and cocktail parties.

At almost every family occasion, even as a guest, he brought along his instrument.

He strolled around picnics and BBQs, quietly serenading groups as they sat munching their meals. He stood at the edge of many a dance floor, playing every request anyone would ask to hear. Old standbys, show tunes, ballads, pop songs—you name it. He knew them all by heart.

I’ve seen him seduce the crowd with a passionate tango, whip everyone up into a polka frenzy, and then cool them down with a breezy waltz. He sure knew how to work an audience, to make us all thrilled we’d come and reluctant to leave.

He had eye contact with us as his hand flew over treble and bass; although I watched closely, I never once saw him peck at the bass buttons. His fingers slid easily to the diamond-studded “C” and stretched wide to hold chords as he sang and squeezed music from his magic box.



The late Nick Benedetto

The visual impact of the bellows’ motion added to my fascination with his melody maker. Fully extended with their creamy folds exposed, they smelled deliciously of crisp linen and warm wood. Their decorated edges made a dynamic striped design, first the tops pressed close together while the bottom opened, then the opposite as the pattern danced across the bellows’ moving edges.

We all joined in, clapping or humming when we didn’t know the Italian, Gallic, German or Yiddish words he sang. Inevitably we ended up swaying and holding hands, misty-eyed with shared belonging.

Although only a few of our family have gone on to become serious musicians, thanks to Uncle Nick we all have an appreciation for live music and the dynamic between performer and audience.

The harmonic sound of an accordion will forever bring to all our minds the amazing feeling of actually being a part of the music itself, each beribboned note a present, as Uncle Nick gifted us with his squeeze-boxed melodies.

Maryjo Faith (Costanzo) Morgan studied accordion with the Milo Conservatory (Gary and Skip Milo) in Pine Hill, New Jersey, and played in the all-accordion band there. She is forever grateful to her “music man” Uncle Nick (1911-2005) for instilling in her an appreciation for performance art.

MEMBERS (AND OTHERS!) TALK

Art Suchanek of Boerne, Texas, wrote: "I have enjoyed reading every issue of the *Capa Times* since joining many years ago. Thanks for all of your tireless efforts. Please keep in touch as the accordion has become a real thing to me as I've grown older. My wife belongs to and will be president next year, of the local Newcomers Club and I have played many times for their parties, etc. ."

Roy Wirta of La Mesa, California, wrote: "You are to be commended for the great effort by which you have effected the promotion of the accordion from worldwide down to many individual experiences. I cite 'individual' because it was through you that I became involved with Accordion Lovers Society International (ALSI). This started in 1992 when I sent you your picture, which appeared in the San Diego paper noting that you might like another for your scrapbook. A short time after that, as I understood it, ALSI founder, Harold Estok had a telephone conversation with you about ideas on how to build an accordion club. You, in that conversation, had given Harold my name. Harold then called me and told me about ALSI and invited me to the next club meeting. Thanks, Cheri!"

Marge and Marty Biller of the Laff-Fun Polka Band of Brookfield, Wisconsin, wrote: "Just a quick letter to tell you about our Laff-Fun Polka Band and its origin and development throughout the years.

In January of 1972, as the result of an amateur hour the previous December at the 'Holy Name Society' breakfast, two middle-aged accordionists, Bob Strupp and Marty Biller, were joined by Joe Streck (trumpeter), Bob Burkhard (banjo and vocals), Lenore O'Donnell (piano), Joe Hepp (the original Shakey's Pizza banjoist in Wisconsin), and Marty Biller III (drums).

Through the years, as with many organizations, musicians came and left—some by the hand of God, others by choice.

The workplace dictated our playing schedules. We played evenings when many of us worked during the

daytime. Jobs with travel limited us to weekends, and retirement from the workplace has allowed us to play afternoons, and include retirement homes, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities."

Jeff Fox of Bellingham, Washington, wrote: "I was browsing today and decided to hit accordion players and your site popped up. I have been playing for 30 years and rarely play but for my own enjoyment, although I go to nursing homes and play and always draw good crowds as those older folks really enjoy. A co-worker hates the accordion and always associates it with polka music, which he dearly dislikes. Having a large ethnic repertoire, I knew he loved Irish music, and one evening at a Christmas party he was there and listened for the full 30 minutes. He then told me he did not know the accordion was capable of playing that type of music, but gave me a friendly warning, 'none of that polka stuff.' So, no Polish or Bohemian music for him! Love your site."

Robert Kent of Riverhead, New York, sent a clipping from the *New York Times*, featuring a photo of the Main Squeeze Orchestra, an all-female 15-piece band, performing in New York City's 1st Annual Main Squeeze Outdoor Accordion Festival on July 8, 2006.

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CLOSET ACCORDION PLAYERS OF AMERICA

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NOVEL FEATURES ACCORDIONIST

THE BOOK THIEF

by Markus Zusak

A book review by Maryjo Faith Morgan, Loveland, Colorado

The word-meistering alone is enough to seduce any reader of *The Book Thief*. But what stole my heart was the prominence of an accordionist among the most beloved personalities who people this resonant story.

Author Markus Zusak seems to understand the communicative role an accordion plays, that the notes and songs are vehicles of love, joy, and pain. His touching portrayal allows readers a glimpse at how powerfully music affects our families and our lives. The bellows squeeze out not only melodies, but deep emotion and stark truth. Reading *The Book Thief* makes your heart glad to be or know musicians who slip into the shoulder straps of an accordion, emoting passion through the keys and into the music.

The narrator, "Death," is a surprisingly humorous and companionable guide in this well told tale. Walking along with Death through these pages becomes less odd and even comfortable as chapter by chapter you see new colors and aspects through this unique perspective.

We meet characters who could be our own neighbors, had we lived in a German village during WWII. We see war as we would if we lived literally on the battlefield. We read words strung in unique series that create vivid pictures as surely as if Markus Zusak used paint on canvas. He is at once skillful, playful, and unblinkingly candid. At his hands we experience coming of age in all its awkward exuberance and human reality in all its vulnerable nobility.

Do not let the "children's" label deter you. Though listed for ages 12 and up, *The Book Thief* is not at all childish. Rather, it launches readers, regardless of age, into a spectacular, multifaceted journey. This is one excursion not to be missed by any discerning reader!

Maryjo Faith Morgan is a freelance writer (www.maryjofaithmorgan.com) who has declared *The Book Thief* her favorite read of all time, even edging out *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.



STAYING IN TOUCH WITHOUT CAPA

One of CAPA's first members, Deb Beveridge of Thornton, Colorado, would like to serve as an informal point of contact for those "lovers of the accordion and anything related to the accordion" who wish to stay in contact between CAPA issues. Feel free to contact Deb at BPolkaplamt@aol.com with any kind of accordion-related news.



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