

Summary of the 2015 National Accordion Association Convention

March 5-8 in Plano, Texas @ Southfork Hotel

Written by Laura Jean Niland

The 28th Annual National Accordion Association Convention was held on March 5-8, 2015 in Plano, Texas at the Southfork Hotel. The theme of the Convention was “Duet Together” featuring a host of performing groups who demonstrated their skills and enjoyment of playing the accordion together.



NAA Officials opened the convention on Thursday with an **Accordion Band Camp**. The evening before the Band Camp, a seven inch snowstorm stalled the city, yet many accordionists arrived early Wednesday evening to start off the Band Camp with a full house!



The Band Camp was a huge success this year, featuring two orchestras and a series of duet, trio and accordion ensembles performing. Performers included duet groups: **Chett Warzusen & Gene Neyer, Laura Niland & Beverly Garcia, Lou LeBrun & Sharon Fox, Debra Peters & Carol Garrison**, and more.

The Tulsa Accordion Band performed as well as a representative from the **Arkansas Accordion Band** who performed solo because a couple of members had to cancel due to the weather.





This year, the kids played solos, duets and participated in the Youth Orchestra which performed on Saturday. Their performance was clearly excellent, as they played Albreski's arrangements of: *American Patrol*, *Jambalaya*, *Oh What a Beautiful Morning*, *Reginella Campagnola*. **Job Elliott**, now 16, played a fast and fun version of *Fox and Hound* as his solo.

Each member of the orchestra, as well as all youth participants received bandanas to celebrate their participation in band camp events.



In addition to band camp, **Sharon Seaton** presented Seaton's Circle, a performance critique workshop, and **Dr. Fries** presented workshops on the Roland. **George Secor**, **Charles Sudholt**, **Barbara Duer**, **Ed Casper**, **Tom Vistentin**, **Lou LeBrun** & **Sharon Fox**, **Verlus Burkhart**, **Laura Niland** & **David Janes** (accordion and saxophone) and many others played in **Arlyn Vistentin's 15 Minutes of Fame**, which hosted almost every conventioneer at some point during the convention!

This same area hosted the first **NAA Art Exhibit** with paintings, photos and mixed media featuring a musical theme



The Thursday evening ensemble performances were followed by **Dick Albreski's Fun Recreational Band**, with about 60 participants playing Albreski's arrangements of *Bavarian Nights*, *Maria Medley*, *My Favorite Things*, *My Wife is Happy*, *Syncopated Clock* and *Those Were the Days*.



Elena Fainshtein's Advanced Orchestra, with about 40 participants, played *America the Beautiful*, *Haffner Serenade*, *Old Friends*, *Radetzky's March*, *The Girl from Ipanema*, and *Yankee Doodle Boy*.

Dick Albreski also directed the **Youth Orchestra** with 8 members performing on Saturday: **Job Elliott, Bria Smith, Becca Smith, Isaac Elliott, Laz Elliott, Abigail Bingham, Hannah Swiney, and Madz Smith**.



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Thanks to the ice storm, we had a surprise feature for the Thursday evening music program. The Texas Tech Coral Choir sang *The Bridge over Troubled Waters* for us.



Friday's program started with vendors in full swing: **Nick Ballarini Accordions**, hosting a variety of musicians including **Tony Lovello, Nick Batkovich, Mike Kelly, Paul Betken, John Simkus, Jerry Cigler; Just Accordions** (D. Albreski); **Debra Peters and Carol Garrison's Accordion Stuff** (T-shirts and more, Accordone method DVDs, CDs, accordions); **Shelia Lee** with PH books, DVDs and her blog as well as folks playing duets and jamming; **Castle Accordion with Randy McPeck; Mario Pedone** (lessons, CDs, MP3 and PDF music files); and **The Edge** (Embroidery items).

Workshops started with **Lori Brooke's** popular Yodeling workshop, and **Kim and Dan Christian's demonstration** of proper Expression and Interpretation with your Accordion while creating your own style. **Mario Pedone** demonstrated how to embellish your performance with arpeggios, chords, triplets, then followed with a very popular audience participation workshop, Play Along with Mario on the keyboard.

Beverly Garcia presented an IPAD workshop, demonstrating the use of DeepDishGigBook, an app for the IPAD allowing creation of playlists, managing sheet music pdf files, attaching MP3 files, emailing, drop-box and more features for the "modern musician". This workshop was attended by approximately 50 people, many who indicated an interest in having additional hands-on workshops with the IPAD at future conventions. **Brent Buswell** presented a workshop on the Versatile Accordion and later on Keep'Em Guessing to encourage everyone to take their performance to the next level, then **Gordon Kohl** pitched key components for Playing Accordion Duets. **Debra Peters** demonstrated her smooth style with a Blues Workshop revealing the fun of experimenting with blues music. **Elena and Gregory Fainshtein** presented a workshop on duet performance, **John Simkus** and friends (**Mike Kelly, Jerry Cigler, and Paul Betken**) presented a popular Jazz 101 Workshop with audience participation in 12-bar jazz improvisation. **Sharon Seaton** continued with Seaton's Circle workshop, a positive critique method for performers. **George Secor** gave a masterful presentation of the Moschino Free Bass system. Secor's classical training was clearly evident in his performance. He switched to the Moschino free bass system in 1961 which revolutionized his playing and he continues to perform using this system. **Bob Mansfield**, Secor's student, began on this system about seven months ago, and he and Secor played a duet together with incredible mastery.



Friday Evening performances began with **Kim and Dan Christian, Gordon Kohl, Lori Brooke, Mike Middleton and Denny Malmberg** and continued with the **NAA Dance Party** with **Alan Walling & the AlpenMusikanten Band**. In addition, **Nick Braktovich** hosted an International Folk Dancing class, while **Nick Ballarini & Company** (jazz groups) hosted a jazz session in the lounge area. Conventioneers danced the night away and enjoyed a fun evening with music and friends.

Saturday morning it was time for the **Albreski Youth Band** to practice and perform and also for the first ever **Youth Expo**, facilitated by Laura Niland, where students ages 4-18 played either piano/keyboard/accordion in solo presentation, or duet performance with a second partner of any age, playing any instrument. The purpose of the Expo was to show the link between keyboard/piano and accordion and foster interest in combining musical training to include the accordion. **Dan & Kim Christian**, teachers and professional accordionists, graciously volunteered to critique each performance providing positive feedback for each performer. It is important to continue NAA's work towards increasing interest in accordion with our youth, by using keyboard as a bridge to adding accordion into the teaching repertoire. It is a natural transition to link piano/keyboard and accordion. In the early years of learning, such transitions are easily mastered and can foster enthusiasm towards mastering other instruments, particularly the accordion.



The **Youth Expo** had 14 solo performances (13 on piano, 1 accordion) and 5 duet performances (4 hands-piano). The youngest Youth Expo performer was 4 years old, David Gozlan and played *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* on piano, and our oldest performer was Job Elliott (Dick Albreski instructor), age 16, played *Fox and Hound* on accordion.

Other piano performers included: From instructor Elena Fainshtein, these students participated: Sophie Gozlan (*Ode to Joy*), David and Sophie Gozlan (*Sailing*), Stacy Goral (*Caravan*), Mia Shabanov (*O Susanna*), Stacy Goral and Mia Shabanov (*Beethoven Theme from Symphony #5*), Michael Chuprakov (*Harp son*), Selina Benguesmia (*The Can-Can*), Selina and Katia Benguesmia (*Pretend*), Rachel Kron (*Suzy Polka*), Nathan Evanhar (*Niagra Fall*), Aaron Zaretsky (*Hava Nagalia*), Aaron Zaretsky in duet with his grandmother Rosana Schechter (*Spanish Intermezzo*), Katia Benguesmia (*Over the Rainbow*), Katherine Chuprakov (*Hungarian Dance #5*), and Nathan Evanhar (*music selection not listed*). Other performers included Victor Escamilla (*Moonlight Sonata*) instructor Mary Wright, and Delany Starin (*music selection not listed*), instructor Kristin Webb. All of the participants did a fantastic job with their performances.

Students received their evaluations, a medal and certificate for participation and bandanas. The children were beaming with joy as they received accolades from the crowd. Congratulations to all of these fine young performers for their beautiful music and many thanks go to their teachers and parents for their support and encouragement through the years.

Nick Bratkovich presented Balkan Music, with rhythms to make you practice more! **Stas Venglevski's** revealed the power of the accordion in expressing mood with his Bellows Control workshop. **Dan & Kim Christian** presented a Master's Class workshop to demonstrate proper technique, expression, how to perform more effectively, and present audience appeal. **Gordon Kohl** gave us pointers for all Professional Accordionists and Musicians including how to be successful in today's gig market. **Dr. Fries** continued working with Roland enthusiasts on Saturday. Throughout the hallways, folks were visiting with friends, visiting with vendors, playing at **15 Minutes of Fame**, listening to Cattleman Lounge musicians, and jamming the night away.

The Saturday evening Banquet signaled the close of the National Accordion events for 2015 and featured strollers: **Lou LeBrun, Rollie Revering, Ed Casper** and others, soon followed by the famous Congo Line signaling the end of the banquet.

Saturday Evening Concert



Bob Mansfield and George Secor



Paul Betken



Jerry Cigler



Brent and Crista Buswell



Gregory and Elena Fainstein



Stas Venglevski



John Simkus



Stas and John Simkus

The Saturday Evening concert was a two part Showcase. **Accordion Showcase Part I**, focused on American classic music. **George Secor**, free bass accordionist extraordinaire, played *Prelude & Fugue in C Minor*, *The Holy City* and then played a duet with **Bob Mansfield**, *Canzone per Sonare No. 2*. Their performance was absolutely magnificent, and showed great composure and command of the free bass system. Next was the American jazz performance with ensemble group headed by **Paul Betken and Jerry Cigler** on accordions, accompanied by a bass player and a drummer. They played *Take the "A" Train*, *There Will Never Be Another You*, *All the Things You Are*, *New York, New York*, and *Bye Bye Blackbird*. They were joined by Chicago jazz accordionist, **John Simkus** as well. **Simkus** demonstrated his fun freelance style of jazz performance, as he enjoys "playing around" with his music.

Christa (on keyboard) and **Brent Buswell** (on accordion) played a several of great American classics including a *Celtic Medley*, *Alley Cat*, *Pennsylvania Polka*, *Orange Blossom Special*, and *Clarinet Polka*. The Buswells have a phenomenal repertoire and a huge audience following. This is their second appearance at NAA, as they first performed here 8 years ago, when they were newlyweds. This was Brent's third appearance. They received a standing ovation for their beautiful performance. The Buswells completed the program of American classics and led us into Part II of the Showcase.

Part II of the Accordion Showcase was a blend of classical Russian music with modern American jazz, a combination that was masterfully mixed by lead accordionist, **Stas Venglevski**. First, **Elena and Gregory Fainshtein**, led the performance with their own beautiful renditions of : *Libertango*, *Chadrash*, *Por Una Cabeza*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* . The **Fainshteins** have been performing together since they were 17, and came to the United States via Belarus and then Israel. Their multicultural influences are evident in their performance. Next, **Stas Venglevski** played a variety of Russian pieces, including several that he had written: *Semeyonovna*, *Jok*, *Tango Commander*, *Russian Cowboy*, *Unhitch the Horses Lads*, *Russian Winter*, and *Spring Dance*. Stas' playing interplay with the audience leads us into the joy of his music. He received a standing ovation for his forceful, and tremendous talent on the accordion.

Later, **Stas Venglevski** invited friends, **Elena and Gregory Fainshtein** to play a trio performance of special selections including: *Humoresque*, *Musette Caprice* (by Stas Venglevski), and *Brightly Shines the Moon*. The blend of the three accordions revealed the mastery of each of these musicians. For the finale, the trio was joined by their friend, **John Simkus**, in a new and vibrant rendition of a classic Russian piece, *Ozonie Naigrishi*, or as John might know it, "oom-pah". The quartet played this beautiful Russian piece with whimsy and style, as they blended the classic Russian style with the

playful style of Chicago jazz, introduced by Simkus. It was fun, refreshing, exciting, joyful, beautiful and totally awesome! **Many thanks go to Stas Venglevski and his friends, Elena and Gregory Fainshtein and John Simkus for blending the music of two cultures and showing us all how to embrace unity.**

Though the evening show had ended, there was still music in the hallways, as conventioners bid their farewell to new and old friends. It was time to close the Convention and think about what we had learned, while making plans to return again to revitalize our love for the accordion.

Many thanks go to the Officers and Board of the National Accordion Association.



We wish to thank the following Officers and Board Members: **Norman Seaton, Greg Klugiewicz (Convention Manager), Judy Dillard, Rebecca Ratliff, Nick Ballarini, Louise and Bill Kucera, Sharon Seaton, Nancy Bernstein, and Chett Warzusen** who spent countless hours organizing and planning for this convention. Their dedication to the Association was clearly evident in the many happy faces of the conventioners. Also many thanks to our sound man, **Tom Jordan**, who was kind and gracious and helped with all the electronic gear. We also thank the staff of the Southfork Hotel in Plano, Texas for their dedicated service to our NAA Convention this year.

We all look forward to another successful National Accordion Convention in 2016.