



AMERICAN ACCORDIONISTS' ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

The official membership publication of the American Accordionists' Association

January/February 2025

From the Editor

Welcome to the January/February 2025 Edition of the AAA Newsletter!

As we welcome 2025, we also welcome our incoming President Don Gerundo and his new Executive Team comprised of Joan Grauman Morse - First Vice President, Mike Silvia - Second Vice President, Rita Davidson Barnea - Secretary, and Ray Oreggia - Treasurer.

The excitement builds as we put our plans together for our 87th anniversary of the American Accordionists' Association! The AAA festival will return to the Marriott Philadelphia West in Conshohocken, PA, July 10-13, 2025. Featuring guest artist performers from the USA and abroad, workshops, two festival orchestras, exhibits, and other exciting activities, you can stay up to date on all the festival plans on our website at www.ameraccord.com.

My sincere thanks to our Newsletter Publisher, AAA's immediate past president Frank Busso Jr. As always, I would also like to thank our Secretary Rita Barnea for her outstanding work in helping source accordion events and news items to include in our Newsletter publications.

Items for the March-April '25 Newsletter can be sent to me at ameraccordnewsletter@gmail.com. Please include 'AAA Newsletter' in the subject box, so we don't miss any items you submit. As always, text should be sent within the e-mail or as a Word attachment if possible. Pictures should be sent as a high quality .jpg file (or similar) and the larger the file size the better. We can always reduce/crop the picture if necessary, however we are unable to increase the quality from smaller pictures. Please send your items as soon as possible, in order to ensure they are included in the upcoming issue.

Thanking you in advance for sending us your news items, and with best wishes for a wonderful 2025,

Kevin Friedrich, AAA Newsletter Editor - ameraccordnewsletter@gmail.com



Save the date!

**AAA Festival
July 10-13, 2025**

West Conshohocken, PA (Philadelphia area)

Guest Artists Concerts Workshops
Competitions Museum Display
Orchestras Exhibits Food Functions
...and More!



**Watch ameraccord.com for
hotel discount code and other festival announcements!**

Meet your 2025-2026 AAA Executive Team

Don Gerundo - AAA President: Don is an active accordionist and pianist performing in the New York metropolitan area. He is a versatile keyboardist who plays various styles ranging from popular American Standards from the American Songbook, jazz, and rock 'n' roll.

Don starting playing the accordion at age 5 with Dr. Sal Febbraio. He also studied with Tony Mecca and later studied piano with Johnny Morris. He also studied jazz improvisation with Adolph Sandole, one of the Sandole brothers famous for teaching many great jazz artists in New York City.

Don performed club dates as a teenager with many of the local leaders in the New York metropolitan area as well as working at resorts in New York's Catskills area. He has worked with Latin salsa bands, blues bands, and jazz groups. This "on the job" training helped him hone his improvising skills as well as build his repertoire. He continued to perform during his college years attending Ithaca College, where he joined the national music fraternity Phi Mu Alpha as the first accordionist to be offered an invitation in that chapter.

For the last several years, Don has focused on the Free Bass Accordion and exploring its use in the pop and jazz idioms by utilizing its flexibility in chord voicings, bass lines, and general accompaniment.

Don is also an experienced user of Finale (music notation software) and has used it since 1992 almost from its inception. He uses it to create arrangements, generate materials for students, create transcriptions, and compose. He has given workshops and demonstrations using this music software.



Joan Grauman Morse - AAA 1st Vice President: Joan began playing piano at the age of 6. She received a BA in Piano Performance and Music Education from the University of Maryland Baltimore County in 1977. Joan began performing, teaching, and choreographing international dances as a teenager. At the age of 23, she "borrowed" her father's accordion to learn to play the (mainly Balkan) folk music she loved. At the age of 26, she also taught herself the Austrian diatonic accordion to play German and Austrian music for a local dance group.

"I never dreamed just how much of a role the accordion would end up playing in my life!" Joan says with joy. She was the accordionist in the celebrated Balkan band BAMCO (1983-2001), as the solo musician for a Bavarian dance group (1979-1982), in a duo with award-winning wind musician Daniel Rozas (1990s), and subbed in three Washington, DC area Klezmer bands.

In 1994, she created the mail-order accordion gift business "SqueezinArt" with her then-husband Dan Grauman. The company (1994-2019) featured Joan's accordion art on clothing, and other gift items. In 2008, she illustrated a children's book, "An Accordion! What is That?" written by Karen Malan Uribe with music and narration by

Mary Tokarski.

In 2004 Joan founded and directed the Virginia-based Potomac Accordion Ensemble (2004-2018) and was the music director (2003-2018) of the Washington Metropolitan Accordion Society. She founded and co-directed an accordion orchestra camp, the "Frank Marocco/Mesa Accordion Event" (2007-2014).

Joan has performed, given workshops, and played in festival accordion orchestras worldwide. She has been on the AAA Governing Board since 2006 and served as the AAA's Historian since 2008.

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Mike Silvia - AAA 2nd Vice President: Mike is an e-commerce and digital experience design professional, who has served in various leadership positions for state government, the IRS, New Balance, and Mercer. He is currently a user experience design director in the insurance industry. Mike holds an MS in public affairs from the University of Massachusetts and a BA in history and political science from Salve Regina University in Newport, RI. He studied the accordion under Anthony Imbriglio, Sr. for about 9 years.

Mike has the fondest memories of the AAA festivals that he attended from 1979, when it was held in Miami, through 1983, when it was held in Hershey, PA. Shortly after the 1983 AAA festival, he put his accordion away for well over 30 years. However, he remained close with several of his accordion friends, and in 2017, a few of them competed in Princeton at the AAA festival. They've been attending every year since then.

Mike has been a member of the Accordion Teachers Association of Massachusetts (ATAM) since 2018. He currently serves as the organization's president and chairs its virtual competition. Mike was also instrumental in implementing the AAA's virtual competition during the pandemic. In 2023, Mike was elected to serve on the AAA Board.

Rita Davidson Barnea - AAA Secretary: Rita is an honors graduate of the University of Connecticut, having received a BS degree in music education, and has been a member of the AAA board for many years. For over 14 years, Rita has served as the national editor of accordionusa.com, covering accordion artists, concerts, and other events taking place in North America.

Rita presents workshops and concerts on "The Life and Music of Eugene Ettore," "The Use of the Accordion in the Teaching of Music in School," and "How to Organize a Children's Birthday Party" centered around the use of the accordion. Rita has adjudicated at many accordion competitions over the years, and performed in concerts, workshops, and accordion festivals throughout the USA.

Rita retired from a 30-year career as a public-school music teacher in West Orange, NJ, where she used her accordion every day in the



classroom and as an accompanist for concerts and programs. She is the creator and curator of the Eugene Ettore Memorial Website, which contains photos, articles, and other valuable information about Eugene Ettore.



Ray Oreggia - AAA Treasurer: Ray Oreggia has been an American Accordionists' Association governing board member for several years and has served as the organization's Treasurer since 2017. He studied accordion under one of the AAA's founding members, Joe Biviano.

Ray received a Bachelor of Science degree in Life Science from the New Institute of Technology. Over the years, he has performed at countless venues and with numerous ensembles and orchestras of varied instrumentation. Ray has been a strong supporter of the Long Island Accordion Association since its inception in 2010.

2025 AAA Festival

~ celebrating 87 years! ~

Please mark your calendars for what is shaping up to be a very exciting weekend of accordion music, concerts, and education-related seminars and presentations!

The 2025 AAA Festival will take place Thursday, July 10 to Sunday, July 13. The Marriott Philadelphia West hotel in Conshohocken, PA suits the needs of our festival in so many ways, and so we return for our third consecutive year! The hotel is a short drive or train ride into the heart of Philadelphia, where you will find beautiful parks, museums, historic areas, waterfronts, and small quaint

opportunities for attendees to play in various venues, we will have an exhibit room, competitions for all ages, workshops, and more.

Festival orchestra conductor Mary Ann Covone holds a Bachelor's Degree in Accordion Performance from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music where she studied with Professor Joan Cochran Sommers. After graduating from the university, Mary Ann spent several years performing and teaching in the Chicago area before entering law school. After a 30-plus

year career as an attorney, four years ago, Mary Ann returned to the accordion and has embarked on a new journey in music performing, teaching and conducting.

In 2020, she founded the Chicagoland Accordion Academy in Western Springs, IL, where students of all ages learn the foundation of good accordion technique applicable to any style of music they choose to play. Mary Ann conducts her

Academy Accordion Orchestra, and they perform quite regularly in the Chicago area. She also travels to Kansas City, MO on a regular basis to play in the UMKC Community Accordion Ensemble under the direction of Joan Cochran Sommers. Mary Ann is the immediate past president of the Accordionists & Teachers Guild, International and an active member of Sigma Alpha Iota, an international professional sorority for women in the field of music.

Visit the AAA website, www.ameraccord.com, for festival updates and hotel information. We look forward to seeing you there!



Mark your calendars!

AAA Festival

July 10-13, 2025

**West Conshohocken, PA
in the Philadelphia Area**

Guest Artists

Concerts

Workshops

Competitions

Orchestras

Exhibits

Food Functions

...and More!



**Watch ameraccord.com for
hotel discount code and other festival announcements!**

towns nearby.

The event's full registration package will include all food functions: two luncheons, an informal dinner, a banquet, and a farewell breakfast on Sunday. Workshops will feature topics such as playing for Oktoberfests, led by Dominic Karcic, and how to create a successful accordion school, led by Mary Ann Covone.

The festival will feature an orchestra for intermediate to advanced players under the baton of our very personable and talented guest conductor Mary Ann Covone, a beginner orchestra for adults led by Joanna Darrow, and a youth orchestra led by Dee Langley. Along with

Elsie Bennett Composition Competition

The 2025 American Accordionists' Association' annual Elsie M. Bennett Contemporary Accordion Composition Contest is now open for entries, and all interested composers are invited to participate, regardless of whether or not they play the accordion. Contribute to the growth of contemporary concert works for accordion!

The purpose of this competition is to add to the contemporary concert repertoire of the accordion. The compositions may be a solo or chamber work with other instruments of the composer's choosing. The contestant will find it helpful to study The Composer's Guide to the Piano Accordion, hear some performances of AAA commissioned works, read special articles about these works, and listen to some of our past composition winners, all found on the AAA website.

There will be a first-place award offered in both the Open and the Junior Categories. A second-place award is sometimes possible in the Open category based on merit and available funding for any given year. (The AAA reserves the right to grant no awards based on the quality of submitted entries and the number of competitors for either category.) A cash award in the amount of \$500 will be presented to the first-place winner in the Open Division, and a cash award in the amount of \$250 will be presented to the first-place winner in the Junior Division or the second-place winner of the Open Division (again, based on quality and available funding).

A panel of prominent accordionists and composers will be assembled by the AAA to judge all submissions. The decision of the judges will be final.

The deadline for entries is April 12, 2025 and winners will be notified by email on or about July 1, 2025. For further information, detailed competition guidelines and the official entry form, please visit www.ameraccord.com.



Elsie is pictured with Paul Creston as he completes his popular work, Prelude and Dance.

Hanzhi Wang in Concert

Hanzhi Wang, one of the featured guest artists at the 2024 AAA Festival, recently performed in Colorado. Her first concert was on February 22 at the Church of the Eternal Hills in Tabernash, an event described as a "Classical Excellence in a Casual Atmosphere." Her second Colorado concert was on February 23 at a private residence between Cheeseman & Congress Park in Denver.

Described as a groundbreaking artist, Hanzhi Wang redefines the possibilities of the accordion. With staggering virtuosity and a magnetic stage presence, Hanzhi is not just an extraordinary musician; she is a passionate ambassador for her instrument, bringing its rich and nuanced sound to the forefront of classical music.

Hanzhi Wang's accolades speak for themselves. She holds the distinction of being the first accordionist ever to join the prestigious roster of Young Concert Artists in its 63-year history. Her landmark achievements include making her Carnegie Hall debut, opening the Young Concert Artists Series at The Kennedy Center, and earning Musical America's coveted "New Artist of the Month" title. Hanzhi's pioneering solo album, *On the Path to H.C. Andersen*, marked the Naxos label's first-ever accordion recording and was nominated for the Danish Radio P2 Prize in 2019. Her unparalleled artistry has also earned her top prizes at notable international competitions, including the Premio Internazionale Fisarmonica Castelfidardo in Italy.



As both a soloist and chamber musician, Hanzhi captivates audiences worldwide. She has appeared at UC Santa Barbara, Stanford Live, Bravo! Vail, and Tanglewood, and has collaborated with luminaries like mandolinist Avi Avital and saxophonist Steven Banks. With a repertoire that spans classical masterworks to contemporary compositions, many written for and dedicated specifically to her, she brings her instrument to life in ways that are both thrilling and deeply moving. Upcoming highlights include performances with the New York Philharmonic, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and at London's Wigmore Hall, showcasing her dedication to expanding the boundaries of her craft.

The Passing of Former AAA Board Member, Daniel Desiderio

The AAA is saddened to report the passing of Daniel J. Desiderio, a renowned accordion teacher, composer, arranger, and recording artist.

A student of Pietro Deiro, he was a featured soloist in the United States Air Force Band from 1951 to 1955, where he performed for many dignitaries, including President and Mrs. Eisenhower at The White House. Following his military service, he returned home to open his own accordion conservatory in the Philadelphia area and also performed on radio and television and in numerous concert halls, including twice at New York's Carnegie Hall.

A former AAA board member, Mr. Desiderio was also a founding member of the PA Accordion Teachers Association. In 1985, he took over as conductor of the Accordion Pops Orchestra, leading the orchestra until his retirement in 2011. Under his musical direction, the group performed many concerts, including four times at Philadelphia's Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts.

Mr. Desiderio passed away on March 3, 2025. A detailed tribute celebrating his life will be included in our next AAA Newsletter.



The New England Digital Accordion Orchestra

The New England Digital Accordion Orchestra was invited back for the fourth consecutive time to be among the approximately 70 entertainment acts performing at First Night Chatham, one of the handful of such events still running in the country.

Every New Year's Eve since 1991, the churches, schools, Town Hall, Community Center, theaters, and lodges of the beautiful seaside village of Chatham on Cape Cod, MA open their doors to host some of the best entertainment acts from throughout New England and beyond.

Venues are all within walking distance along the Village's Main Street or accessible by free shuttle buses which run throughout the event. Many of the activities cater to young families making First Night Chatham one of the nation's premier family-centered, alcohol-free celebrations for ringing in the New Year!

The Orchestra was one of the acts opening up the day's activities, performing concerts at the United Methodist Church on Main Street. For the Orchestra, performing at First Night Chatham is a much-anticipated highlight on its annual schedule of performances.

The NEDAO is truly unique because of its ability to produce such a wide variety of instrumental sounds and to perform in the varied styles of so many different types of ensembles. Audiences at their concerts are treated to a smorgasbord of instrumentation and musical styles. Whether it's Broadway musicals, Hollywood movies, rock 'n' roll, country hits, classical compositions, big band swing or Dixieland, ethnic, or patriotic favorites, music lovers get a taste of each at an NEDAO concert. Audiences experience an array of "mini concerts" of many ensemble types and genres in one sitting.



Formed in 2015 by its conductor, internationally recognized accordionist and music educator, Anselmo "Sam" Falcetti of Wilbraham, MA, the NEDAO draws its members from four of the six New England States.

Videos of NEDAO performances can be viewed on YouTube and Facebook by searching for "New England Digital Accordion Orchestra."

To arrange a performance or for further information: Sam Falcetti (413) 204-5522 or samfalcetti@gmail.com.

AAA Commissioned Works

AAA Board of Director Dr. Robert Young McMahan has published an extensively comprehensive article profiling three of the AAA's commissions, including Cooper Square by Wallingford Riegger, Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra by Paul Creston, and Lamentations by Virgil Thomson.

Following the first commission of the American Accordionists' Association Composers' Commissioning Committee (CCC) in 1957, Paul Creston's landmark Prelude and Dance, CCC Chairperson Elsie Bennett promptly and boldly set upon assigning three more works in close succession within a 12-month span, resulting in Wallingford Riegger's Cooper Square, Paul Creston's Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra, and Virgil Thomson's Lamentations, contracted respectively in April 1958, July 1958, and April 1959. A more widely diverse and renowned representation of world-famous American composers of that time could hardly be imagined and was quite a coup for the AAA and the growing contemporary repertoire for the accordion.



Wallingford Riegger



Paul Creston



Virgil Thomson

Wallingford Riegger had achieved world recognition in the 1920s as an early American proponent of atonality and 12-tone serialism, and was proclaimed by modern music pundits to be a member of the then-avant-garde "American Five," the other four of whom were Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, John Becker, and Henry Cowell (the last to eventually be commissioned twice by the AAA as well). Sometimes, however, he would write in more traditional ways as he did in this rather humorous, boisterous, and at times, Latin dance-style piece. The title might have referred to the Five Spot, a popular eatery on Cooper Square in New York City where many noted musicians, mostly in the jazz field, often informally performed.

Creston's highly virtuosic and entertaining three-movement concerto is a landmark work for our instrument, especially in the USA, where it has enjoyed many excellent performances with both world renowned and local symphony orchestras and is an indispensable part of every concert accordionist's repertoire. It represents Creston at his very best.

It may be argued that Missouri-born Virgil Thomson made his first great mark on the world in the Paris of the 1920s where he, like many artists both in or visiting that musical mecca of the day, was in the court of the curious and great literary figure residing there then, American born writer and poet Gertrude Stein. Thomson's fame was arguably first established by his and Stein's curious opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), in which he elected to conspicuously include the accordion throughout the orchestration. Generally a rather harmonically traditional composer, his commissioned solo for the AAA, *Lamentations*, is a series of virtuosic variations on a loud, almost terrifying marching theme consisting of crashing dissonant polychords. It is one of the most interesting and curious AAA commissions.

All three composers were greatly respected figures in America's formative period in modern music. Creston and Thomson were generally regarded as the more conservative of the three while Riegger had a somewhat more radical reputation, both musically and politically.

Read the full article and others at www.ameraccord.com/aaacommissions24.php

Peter Soave to Appear at ATG Festival

Renowned master of accordion and bandoneon Peter Soave will make a return to his native United States to appear at the 2025 ATG Festival in Lisle, IL (Chicago area). Peter will perform on bandoneon with a string quintet during the Thursday night concert on July 17 at nearby Wheaton College.

Of Italian descent, Peter Soave's earliest memories are of music played on an accordion. By age three, he was certain of his life's work. He began music studies at five and quickly gravitated towards classical music. At 16, he entered international competitions and swept first place four times, confirming his reputation as a virtuoso of the highest order: Grand Prix in Neu Isenberg in West Germany; Klingenthal Wettbewerb in East Germany; Coupe Mondiale in Folkstone, England; and the Trophée Mondiale in Arrezano, Italy.

In 1987, Peter Soave was the inaugural recipient of "Voce d'Oro," the international award honoring those who have given prominence to the accordion in the world of modern music. Deeply inspired by the music of Argentinean composer Astor Piazzolla, Mr. Soave's impassioned musicianship motivated him to include the characteristic bandoneon in his performances.

Mr. Soave's engagements include performances as a soloist and with orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout North and South America, Asia, Middle East, Europe, and Russia. He has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, Brooklyn Philharmonic, Zagreb Philharmonic, Windsor Symphony, Flint Symphony, San Salvador Philharmonic, Belgrade Philharmonic, Lubbock Symphony, Bellevue Philharmonic, Walla Walla Symphony, Orquesta Sinfónica de Puerto Rico, Williamsport Symphony, Orquesta Sinfónica Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho, and The Zagreb Soloists. Mr. Soave collaborated with conductors such as James Levine, Neeme Jarvi, Thomas Wilkins, Robert Spano, Leone Mageira, Hermann Michael, Duilio Dobrin, and Guillermo Figueroa. For the only North America appearance in 1999 of the "Three Tenors," Soave performed as the featured bandoneonist. He has also appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America."

In 2007, Soave premiered Astor Piazzolla's oratorio "El Pueblo Joven," written for symphony orchestra, voice recitative, soprano, bandoneon, choir, and percussion, with the Radio Romania Chamber Orchestra, Romania.

Mr. Soave has had numerous compositions written for him by Venezuela's foremost composer, Aldemaro Romero: "Piazzollana-Homage à Piazzolla" for bandoneon and full orchestra; "Suite de Castelfidardo" for bandoneon and string orchestra; "Soavecito" for accordion and string orchestra; and "Tango Furioso" for bandoneon and string quartet. Romero's "Five Paleontological Mysteries" for accordion and string quartet received its American premiere in Detroit in February 2008 and its European premiere in Italy in July 2008.

Mr. Soave's discography includes a solo album "Pride and Passion," "Five Tango Sensations" with The Rucner String Quartet, a double CD "Undertango 2," and "Peter Soave & Symphony Orchestra," featuring the music of Astor Piazzolla and Carmine Coppola. His recording awards include the Detroit Music Award for Best Classical Recording in 2001 and Best Classical Instrumentalist in 2003.

Eager to harmonize nature and music, Soave founded the Peter Soave Music Academy in the Dolomite Mountains in Italy in 2010, welcoming music lovers to convene and share.

Mr. Soave plays a "Mythos #002" concert accordion and an "Adrian #001" bandoneon, both made by Pignini in Italy.

The ATG is excited to have their 1984 US and Coupe Mondiale champion Peter Soave join the stage along as one of their series of exceptional guest artists!



Stas Venglevski in Carnegie Hall

Stas Venglevski was given the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall on February 20, 2025. The 30-minute solo set of his program featured his original compositions and a few classical selections. After intermission, he was the featured soloist with the New York Chamber Players under the direction of Maestro Giacomo Franci, performing his original composition "Rondo-Fantasy."

His artistry, dazzling technical command, and sensitivity have brought Stanislav "Stas" Venglevski, a native of the Republic of Moldova, part of the former Soviet Union, increasing acclaim as a virtuoso of the Bayan. A two-time first prize winner of Bayan competition in the Republic of Moldova, Stas is a graduate of the Russian Academy of Music in Moscow, where he received his Master's Degree in music under the tutelage of the famed Russian Bayanist, Friedrich Lips.

Recently, Stas was featured in a program called "15 Minutes of Fame," where he performed 15 one-minute works written specifically for him and his accordion. The composers selected for this set are: Michalis Andronikou, David Bohn, Stephen de Filippo, John Kefala Kerr, Chihchun Chi-sun Lee, Rosita Piritore, Ryan Charles Ramer, Cornelia Schmid, David Unger, Robert Voisey, Anna Vriend, Willyn Whiting, Matthew Williamson, Yehuda Yannay, and Yuriy Zhikrivetskiy

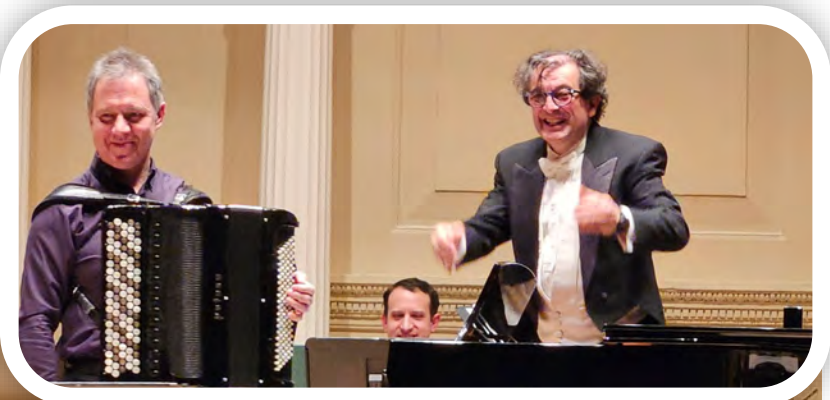
In 1992, Stas immigrated to the United States. He is an accordionist, musician, arranger, entertainer, and teacher. As a performer, his repertoire includes his original compositions, a broad range of classical, contemporary, and ethnic music.

He has toured extensively as a soloist throughout the former Soviet Union, Canada, Europe, and the United States, including numerous performances with Doc Severinsen and Steve Allen, and with Garrison Keillor on the *Prairie Home Companion* Show. Additionally, he has performed with symphony orchestras throughout the United States.

Stas performed the world premiere of "Concerto No. 2" by Anthony Galla

-Rini and also the world premiere of "Bayan and Beyond," composed for Stas by Dan Lawitts. Stas is a regular participant the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's Arts in Community Education Program (ACE); has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Tacoma Symphony Orchestra; has done television commercials and performed in theater productions; produced 15 acclaimed albums including a transcription of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite" for Bayan as well as one of original compositions. He has published several books of original compositions.

Stas founded Accordion XXI Century Series in 2010 so that the Midwest audiences can experience the amazing diversity of the accordion by bringing gifted artists from all over the world. In a concert setting, these gifted musicians share their skills and cultures to provide the audience with a unique musical experience. The performances feature the accordion, and when possible, in concert with other instruments. Stas' brilliant artistry and musical virtuosity afford an expanded dimension in music and an innovative musical adventure to the audience. Beyond his artistry, he is a consummate entertainer capable of engaging any audience.



World Accordion Day and Palmer Fest 2025

A World of Accordions Museum announces that plans are well underway for its annual World Accordion Day and Willard. A. Palmer Festival to be held May 2-4, 2025 in Superior, WI at the Hanni Strahl Concert Hall at the World of Accordions Museum.

The weekend will feature guest artists, a festival orchestra, workshops and social functions, as well as tours of the impressive collection of over 2,500 instruments spanning the almost-200 years of accordion history. The annual festival pays tribute to the 1829 accordion patent filing by Cyril Damian, as well as the genius of the legendary Dr. Willard A. Palmer.

World Accordion Day is an initiative of the Confédération Internationale des Accordeonistes (CIA). The first celebration was held on May 6, 2009, marking the 180th birthday of the accordion (May 6, 1829, the date the accordion patent was filed).

On May 6, 1829, Cyrill Demian (1772–1849), an organ and piano maker of Armenian origin, accompanied by his two sons Karl and Guido, filed a patent in Vienna, Austria for the accordion. Consign: No. 1433 listed a new type of instrument consisting of a small box with “feathers of metal plates and bellows fixed to it” making it easy to carry and play. The new instrument was seven to nine inches long, three-and-a-half inches wide, and two inches high. The bellows were fixed above the box with five claves fixed below.

The makers claimed it was possible to perform marches, arias, melodies, even by an amateur of music with little practice, and to play the loveliest and most pleasant chords of three, four and five voices with little practice. The patent was approved a short time later on May 23, 1829.

Since 2009, World Accordion Day has been very successful, generating much positive publicity for the accordion.

A World of Accordions Museum houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of accordions in the world. We invite you to visit www.worldofaccordions.org for further details as they become available. For further information on World Accordion Day, please visit www.accordions.com/cia.



Finn Catches Eyes and Ears of New York Times

The solo album “Rameau” by Finnish accordionist Janne Valkeajoki was recently highlighted by The New York Times as one of the best albums of 2024. The album features works by Jean-Philippe Rameau, which were “originally composed for harpsichord by the French composer, also known as a music theorist, in the 1700s.”

“The accordion was invented more than half a century after Rameau’s death, but on the album accordionist Janne Valkeajoki convincingly demonstrates how naturally and beautifully Rameau’s keyboard works can adapt to the alternately intimate and alternately symphonic nature of the accordion,” The New York Times describes.

“According to Valkeajoki, the album project has been long. He says he listened to Rameau’s music sometime during his student days. That’s when he found the French

composer’s music in the library and started playing it on the accordion.”

Both accordionist and conductor, Janne Valkeajoki (born in 1992) is a musical force of nature. Be it presenting his own Baroque adaptations or giving world premiere performances, either as a soloist or directing on the podium, Valkeajoki’s commitment is ever at the highest level. No wonder his roster includes inspired collaborations and notable commissions from composers such as Magnus Lindberg, Kalevi Aho, Vito Žuraj, Sebastian Hilli, Cecilia Damström, Aulis Sallinen, Pierluigi Billone, Michael Quell and Viera Janáčková. Onstage, Valkeajoki’s musical presence is both intellectually ravishing and emotionally spellbinding, his sonorous imagination embracing structural clarity, refined detail, and visceral drive in equal measure.

Alongside uplifting live performances, Valkeajoki’s insightful interpretations can be heard on several fascinating album takes – his discography ranging from Jean-Philippe Rameau to new commissions, as caught on microphones by Orchid Classics, Neos, BIS Records, Kairos, and Alba Records.

Valkeajoki studied accordion and conducting at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts in Helsinki with Matti Rantanen and the one-and-only Jorma Panula, deepening his craft and knowledge at the University of Music in Würzburg, under Stefan Hussong and Ari Rasilainen. Valkeajoki’s further studies include Paavo Järvi’s Conductors’ Academy in conjunction with the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich.

The album “Rameau” can be found at multiple online outlets such as Amazon and eBay, or platforms such as Spotify.



Reflections: An Interview with Maddalena Belfiore, by Kevin Friedrich

Almost 20 years ago, I had the pleasure of sitting down with one of AAA's most well-known entities, Maddalena Belfiore. The interview was conducted at her home in Kearny, NJ on March 26, 2006. Little did we know how timely this was, as we sadly lost her just over a year later on May 18, 2007.

The interview was conducted to coincide with her being awarded Honorary Membership of the Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA) in recognition of the many decades of support of the CIA, including serving as a Vice President, acting President, International Delegate, International Jury Member, and major and founding donor to the CIA Archives housed in Ikaalinen, Finland.

Born in Kearny, Maddalena graduated from Queen of Peace High School in Kearny, receiving first honors. She began her accordion studies at the age of five and, at age 11, became a protégé of legendary accordionist and one of the founding members of the AAA, Pietro Frosini.

She began musical studies at the Juilliard School of Music at age 13, studying theory, harmony, conducting, and compositions, and also attended Columbia University. Maddalena composed accordion method books and technical books on bellow shakes and appeared in concerts throughout the United States, including Carnegie Hall in New York City, Canada, and Europe. She also performed with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and was an adjudicator for numerous international and national music competitions.

Maddalena was the founder and director of the Arcari Foundation, founder, past president, and director of the Accordion Teachers Association of New Jersey, and officer of the American Accordionists' Association since 1964, where she was three-term president, executive secretary, and director and organizer of AAA competitions. She instituted the Young Artists Concerts at Carnegie Hall, presenting AAA National Winners.

A first vice president of the Confederation International des Accordeonistes since 1974, Maddalena was an AAA delegate to the CIA since 1971, an AAA delegate to the National Music Council since 1975, and a member of the All-Arts Society of New York. Her awards and distinctions are numerous.

In 1976, Maddalena was the recipient of the International Golden Lady Award and, in 1977 and 1978, she was presented the Outstanding Achievement Award from the State of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, respectively.

In 1980, she received the Golden Record Award from the City of Nashville and was named Woman of the Year by the State of New Jersey. That same year, Maddalena was selected as a member of the panel for U.S. Life and the Family in Washington, D.C.

Owner and director of the Belfiore Accordion Studio in Kearny since 1958, she also was a professor of accordion at Fairleigh Dickinson University. In addition, she authored numerous publications, including First Steps in Bellow Shake, Frosini System of The Bellow Shake, 12 Songs in Bellows Shake, solo pieces including Cavalier Waltz, Valse Diane, and Pan Polka. Through her longtime association with Myron Floren, she co-authored and edited the Myron Floren Method Book, Lets Play Duets and the Showstopper Series.

Question. Tell us a little about the town/city where you were born, and where in the United States is it located?

Answer. I was born right here where we are now in Kearny, New Jersey. (Note: Pronounced "CAR-knee." On March 14, 1867, the New Jersey Legislature adopted "an act creating the Township of Kearny." The town was named to honor Major General Phil Kearny, Commander of the New Jersey Forces in the Civil War and the late resident of well-known "Belle Grove," locally called Kearny Castle.)

Q. How did you begin your music study and why did you choose the accordion?

A. That's an interesting story because I started music at 5 years old and I had chosen to play the saxophone. How it ended up being that I chose the accordion was: The day I was to start my music lessons, prior to taking me to my first lesson, my father took me to a Vaudeville Show.



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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 2

It was towards the tail end of the Vaudeville era and must have been one of the last shows. Who was on stage? None other than Charlie Magnante. I was fascinated with him and the accordion, and afterwards I said to my father "the accordion...that is what I want to play!"

On the way home from the show, he stopped at the Sanford Arts Music Studio in Newark and I had my first lesson. My father bought the accordion and I had my first lesson all at the same time.

Two weeks later, I was on stage!

Q. Was your family musical and did your parents play an important part in your early music education?

A. My family was quite musical. My grandfather was a conductor, my uncle played the clarinet, my sister studied the piano and my mother played the mandolin (which we still have to this day) and (laughing) my father played the doorbell!

I didn't ask to study music, it was just a given. My sister was taking piano lessons, so when I turned 5 years old, it was time for me to do something.

Q. Who was your first accordion teacher?

A. My first teacher was Sanford Hertz. He was quite well known and operated the Hertz School of Music in Newark, New Jersey. There were five brothers and the father who all played.

I didn't last there very long, as a family friend played the accordion and when he found out that I was starting my lessons, he told my father about Charlie Nunzio, and that is how I left the Hertz studio and went to Charlie Nunzio.

Q. What are your earliest memories of performing?

A. I played the "First Waltz." I think we all played that piece, and I performed this piece two weeks after I started lessons.

Q. During the course of your musical education, is there any teacher or artist (besides Frosini, who will be commented on in the next question) to whom you would like to pay particular tribute for their inspirational effect on your musical career. (Question by Heather Masefield.)

A. I have to say Charlie Nunzio. However, when Charlie went into the service (Navy), Eugene Ettore took over for him. Gene brought another dimension into my playing which is very interesting. Ettore taught me another style of playing and style of music, whereas Nunzio was a lot like the Frosini style.

During that time, when I was 8 years old, we moved to California, and naturally the accordion came, too. I remember at every little tourist stop we made, I had to practice. That was a definite!



Before we left, we had asked about teachers in the San Francisco area, and they had recommended that I look for Guido Deiro. When we got to San Francisco, we tried to find him, but we couldn't. However we found the Pazolo brothers. They were five brothers who were all professional accordionists.

I studied with Theodore Pazolo, which is another interesting happening. He didn't know what to do with me. He would give me five pieces a week, and I would bring them all back memorized. He was a good player, but in general, California didn't have much of the way of anything at that point, so fortunately, we only stayed there a year and came back to Kearny again. My father had found it difficult getting work in California, and so we came back.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 3

Each teacher brought me something. Joe Biviano put me on to Hannon. I faithfully played the Hannon exercise book from beginning to end every day, by memory! Then I went to Arcari, who was an excellent teacher. To summarize, Frosini was the one that made me an artist, Biviano was the one that told me my shortcomings as far as technique goes, and then Arcari was the one that solved the problems. He really was the one that got me into scales.

Q. As a protégé of the late Pietro Frosini, can you tell us about how you met him and the series of events that led to this long-lasting professional relationship?

A. We left off, that before our quick trip to California, I was in New Jersey with Eugene Ettore. My mother and father didn't know who Ettore was. To them, he wasn't a big enough name for me to be studying with at the time. However, they knew of Frosini. The same friend who had sent us to Nunzio was also a friend of Frosini, so he introduced us and that's how I started with Frosini.

I had to audition with him, and from there, our relationship ended up lasting a long time. This all happened right after we came back from California.

Q. Can you tell us about your lessons with him? How often did you study with him, and can you describe a typical lesson?

A. The lessons were something else!

Mostly my sister brought me, and to her credit she carried my accordion on the subways and everything!

When I would go for a lesson, we would wait in his den. His den was about the same size as where we are today (an average size) and so we would just sit in this den and wait. We would sometimes wait for hours until Frosini was ready to give me a lesson. When he was ready, he would call me from the second floor saying.... Madalenn - Madalenn (like Mada-lane, Mada-lane) and that meant he was ready for me to go upstairs for the lesson.



We would go through a lot of music and it all had to be by memory. I saw he had the button accordion, and I would keep asking, "Mr. Frosini.. why can't I play that accordion?" And he would say, "No no, that's the right one. The one you are playing is the right one for you to play, so stay with that."

I had to leave here at 5 AM to meet him. One funny story was that there was a certain place he always wanted to eat. So he said, "Come on, we are going to have breakfast now." The place was all mirrors and when we went in he slammed right into the mirrors, and he then said, "I do that every time I come in here!"

Frosini had a lot of eccentricities. You didn't go for a lesson without bringing him a gift. He expected it. Usually it would be a box of chocolates or a cake or something. The box of candy had to be a box where all the candy was different, and it could not be the box that tells you what is in each piece of candy, because he wouldn't eat it. He had to guess what was in there!

There was a time we went there and we didn't bring anything. He said, "You didn't bring me anything?" So he made my sister go out to the bakery that was on the way to his house and get him a Cushman's Cake.

Another thing he was eccentric about was his pencils! He had a grand piano in his studio, and he did most of his writing on there. He kept all his pencils lined up on the piano. One day I was coming from Julliard, and I wanted to do my homework and I couldn't find a pencil, so I took one of the pencils from on top of his piano. His wife came out screaming, "Don't touch, don't touch! Friso's pencils!"

He had them all in order, in the way he wanted them to write with. No. 1, No. 2, dark, light, big note head and small note head and so on. He had them exactly as he wanted them. But boy...when she started yelling at me!

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 4

My lessons went on for quite a few years. He lived in Sunnyside, Long Island (NY), which is where I would have to go for my lessons.

Frosini didn't have that many students and he was very selective about who he took. Joe Riviero was one of his famous students.



At that time, no one was afraid to travel. As young as we were, we had no fear of traveling. At first, I would take my accordion, but later on I didn't. He let me try one that was at his house, and I could use it, so I would just borrow this for my lessons.

An interesting thing about Frosini is that he liked to sew! He sewed the raccoon hats (Davy Crockett hats). There he was with his needle sewing the tail on the back of the hat and we would just laugh looking at this stuff. He also had a little dog that was very cute. His wife was part of the Danish Opera Company, as she was Danish. After they married however, she really didn't sing any more.

I studied with him from about 10 years old through college. He prepared me for my Carnegie Hall Recital. He was pretty sharp. A couple of times we had him over to the house. His wife would insist that his accordion would come along with him. She wouldn't ask him to play right way, but soon, she would say, "Frous, Frous. Are you gonna play? The Belfiores are waiting for you to play." And he would say, "No no, not yet." So she would take him aside and give him a little 'medication' and he pepped up and he then put the accordion on, and he would start playing, and it was just absolutely amazing. He played operas; he played polkas; he played all kinds of music! His memory was phenomenal! In fact, we had him over the house a number of times.

He had us over to his house, too. He also had a summer place out on the Island, near Quogue, and he had his little fishing boat. He loved to go out on his fishing boat! That was one of his things, so a couple of times, he took my father with him.

After a couple of years, when Frosini was with the John Gambling show, he wanted me to be a part of it, so he had me go down to the radio station and all we did was sit there. Everyone was very polite and all, but John Gambling wouldn't talk to me. He was pretty definite about what he wanted, and I wasn't part of it! Sometimes I would meet Frosini at the radio station and we would go to his house from there.

John Bradley Gambling (April 9, 1897 - November 21, 1974) was the first of three generations of hosts (John B, John A, and John R) of the WOR Radio in New York City. The John Gambling Show "Rambling with Gambling" hosted by John B ran from 1925 - 1959, and later continued by his son and grandson, lasted over the course of 75 years (1925-2000).

Q. Frosini wrote a wealth of repertoire for the accordion. Did he share these ideas with you and were you privy to the compositions as they were being written?

A. Not really. Some of his arrangements were just coming out when I was with him. The La Traviata arrangement came out while I was with him and the Mendelssohn Concerto was another one that came out then.

There were at least 15 pieces that came out while I was there. They were not necessarily originals; mostly transcriptions.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 5

Q. How long did it take him to write some of his pieces? For example, Hot Points and Jolly Caballero?

A. I'm not sure, but my guess is that he just churned them out. He did several copies of each piece. He would do them quickly, and then revise them in the next manuscript.

Q. What other teachers have influenced you?

A. There were several: Nunzio, Ettore, Jacques Welt. He was from Long Island. I was preparing for a concert at the Town Hall, and he coached me for that one. The other teachers were all from Julliard. I studied piano with Zargurnig and Arthur Ferrante (born September 7, 1921 in New York City) was my theory teacher, and I'm very proud of that. I also studied conducting while at Julliard.

Ferrante and Teicher (born Louis Teicher, August 24, 1924 in Wilkes-Barre, PA) became one of the best-selling instrumental easy listening groups of the 1960s. Beginning with classical piano repertoire, due to audience demand, they eventually turned completely to popular piano works, and they had immediate hits with their renditions of "Exodus" and the theme from "The Apartment," and over 10 Top 100 hits in the next 13 years. They continued to record a steady stream of 4 albums a year for United Artists until 1979, when they formed their own label, Avante Garde. They often played to packed concert houses, appearing up to 100 times a year at their peak. Although they retired from performing in 1989, they remain close friends and have settled near each other in the Sarasota, Florida area.

In all, I spent six years at Julliard where I studied general music, including music theory, ear training, piano, and conducting. I was with Frosini at the same time taking accordion lessons. I started Julliard while at high school at age of 13. I went during summers and on Saturdays and then when I graduated from high school, I went as a regular student.

From Julliard, I went to Columbia University, and from there, I went to the Manhattan School of Music, so I really did the circuit. Most of my musical training was at Julliard, and I went to Columbia because I needed credit for Italian and English studies and my non-music credits.



Q. During your career, you performed extensively as a soloist and in groups. Tell us a little about these times and where your concert tours took you.

A. A lot of the solo concerts were for local clubs, music clubs, and women's clubs all throughout the state, and some in Pennsylvania. I would do at least two a month. While I was in high school, I also had to play the USO camps. I'd play the farewell parties for the soldiers going off to war and the local school gym. Later on, I did a number of shows for the Italian prisoners of war. I did at least 20 shows for them. It was very interesting.

I also did a Carnegie Hall Recital at age 17, which was very exciting.

Q. Describe your most "unusual" or "humorous" performance situation/s?

A. Playing for the Italian prisoners of war was of course a bit unusual. However, at my young age, it didn't make any difference to me.

My most humorous moment was during a concert with Myron Floren. He was giving a concert here in Raritan, New Jersey. It was at the local high school and we all went including my sister, Faithe and Ernest Deffner, Frances Margolis...a whole bunch of us.

As normal, Mauro (Maddalena's husband) would always ask me to go on stage to play and play a duo with Myron. I didn't have my accordion with me, so we asked to borrow someone's accordion. Very begrudgingly they agreed, but believe me, they weren't happy! The high school was a brand new, \$8 million school that they had just completed.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 6

Myron came out and introduced me, and I came out of the wings and didn't know there was a step there... and I tripped down the steps! An \$8 million school and there was a step to get out of the wings onto the stage!

So I got myself up and Myron didn't even come to help me, as he was laughing his head off. I had this borrowed accordion on at the same time, and so the owner was having a fit! After the performance was over, I went out into the audience again and my sister started yelling at me, "Boy, you are clumsy!"

No one even asked if I got hurt. They were all just laughing!



Maddalena Belfiore at a Glance

- First stage performance at age five
- Commenced studies at Julliard at age 13
- Debut concert at Carnegie Hall in New York at age 17
- Protégé of Pietro Frosini
- Appeared in concerts throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe
- Featured performer on radio and television
- Second place winner of the Arthur Godfrey Talent Show
- Performed with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (Henry Lewis, Conductor)
- Composer of accordion method books and technical books on bellows shake
- Adjudicator for national and international music competitions
- Adjunct professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ)
- Founder member and director of the Arcari Foundation, Philadelphia
- Founder, Past President, and Director of the ATA of NJ
- Past President of American Accordionists' Association (AAA)
- Board of Director of American Accordionists' Association (AAA)
- Vice President of Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA) for 16 years
- Acting President of Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA)
- Merit Award Recipient of CIA for Outstanding Contributions to International Accordion Movement
- 2nd Honorary Member of Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA)
- Member of All Arts Society of New York
- Initiated ATA of NJ Accordion Orchestra
- Recipient of the International Golden Lady Award
- Woman of the Year Award - State of New Jersey
- International Who's Who in Music
- Marquis Who's Who
- Honoree of Maddalena Belfiore International Competition for Female Accordionists
- Accordion Teachers Association of NJ Hall of Fame Recipient

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 7

Q. You have also written many methods for the accordion, including those dealing with bellows shakes. How many books did you write in all, and are they still available today?

A. I have written three bellows shake books, and then there is the Myron Floren method, which is five books and the technique books. For solos, there is Valse Diane, (Eugene Ettore later did an orchestration), the Pan Polka (Eugene later did an arrangement of that one, too) and Valse Cavalier. Most are available from Ernest Deffner Music. I worked with Myron on the accordion method book; we collaborated on those. In testing the books out, I used them with my students to see if what we were writing for the students was acceptable.

Works and Publications by Maddalena Belfiore

"First Steps in Bellows Shake" by Maddalena Belfiore, published by O. Pagani & Bro.

"12 Bellows Shake Solos" by Maddalena Belfiore, published by O. Pagani & Bro.

"Valse Diane" by Maddalena Belfiore published by O. Pagani & Bro.

"Pan Polka" Solo by Maddalena Belfiore, published by O. Pagani & Bro.

"Pan Polka" Duet by Maddalena Belfiore, published by O. Pagani & Bro.

"Cavalier Waltz" (Valse Brillante) by Maddalena Belfiore

"Shake a Leg" by Pietro Frosini, arranged by Maddalena Belfiore

Q. What was your fascination with the bellows shake?

A. It wasn't something that was a fascination to me; it was just something that came very easily to me. I guess I took it for granted; just do it how I do it. OK! There was nothing really fascinating.

I enjoyed doing the bellows shake enormously, and I know there is definite technique in doing it. I was doing bellows shake before I started with Frosini. I worked on it with him, but I was already doing this before I began with him.

Q. Your students went onto compete very successfully in various competitions. Did you yourself compete in competitions as a young person?

A. During my years with Nunzio, I competed in many competitions. Nunzio put all of his students in the contests. Don't forget he was a founder of AAA and supported the contests very strongly. For my first contest, I think I was about 8 years old, and I won 2nd place playing Dance of the Hours. The early AAA contests were very good. And big!

Q. How long have you been teaching, and who were some of your more outstanding students?

A. I have been teaching all my life. I have had many wonderful students. One interesting one was Paul Lukouswki, an Archbishop in New Jersey. When he became Archbishop, he used the picture of himself with his accordion. A wonderful guy!

We came back in contact with him after all these years, when my son was having his son, Alex, baptized. They had to go to the church in their area where there was a get-together for all the new parents, and Lukouski saw his name "Greco" there. He said to Frank, "I used to know the Grecos. In fact, my accordion teacher is married to a Greco." Frank was beside himself, so they started chatting and my son found out that he had been one of my students. He had studied for a long time!

I have another, Greg Naddick, who has a big studio down in south Jersey. He was with the Army Band and everything.

Terri Conti represented the USA in the international competitions, and in fact, won the 2nd prize in the CIA International Junior Tape Recording Competition. Later, after she joined the Church of God, she entered a world competition that they have which included all instruments. The competition was held in Pasadena, California, and since she always traveled with her accordion, she signed up to be part of it, and she won 2nd prize against all the other instrumentalists. In fact, Sylvia Prior was there and was flabbergasted at how well she did.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 8

Q. Have you made any recordings and if so, when did you record your first LP, CD or cassette?

A. Pagani made and sold a set of 78 RPM recordings of Valse Diane, Rita Polka, and a bellows shake piece. I did another series of recordings that I don't have a copy of, as they were sent to South America. I know that they were played over there, but I don't have a copy. I have copies of the other ones that Pagani made.

Q. You have done so many performances, but do you have any memorable highlights that you would like to share with us?

A. I did a Première performance with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Henry Lewis in Philadelphia. I have the recording of that.

In 1939, we played at the Worlds Fair in New York with the Nunzio Accordion Orchestra. We used to play in parades and on floats such as on the Columbus Day parade in New York City. That was a big one!

I also performed in Castelfidardo, Italy. There was a concert being presented, and Rinaldo Taboldi was on it. The Crucianelli's had mentioned that I was going to be in Italy, so I was invited to play on the concert, and I got a standing ovation for my performance of La Traviata. I played PANcordion, which was built by the Crucianelli family.

Most of the programs I played were of the Frosini Overtures and the Novelties. The Novelties were great, as they served as an exercise. They took the place of doing a lot of exercise practice.



Q. You have had the joy of experiencing an exciting era of accordion in the USA. Are there any accordion stars that you got to know during your accordion career that you would like to mention?

A. Of course, there was Frosini. There was also John Owens. I did a lot of traveling around the United States doing concerts, and also a lot of studio work. At that time, the studios were all featuring the big name artists, so I got to meet all of them, including Magnante and others. I also knew many of them through the American Accordionists Association.

Not all of the meetings with famous personalities have been so great, however. When I was pregnant with my son, I had big concert and at the same time, Mogens Ellegaard from Denmark was going to around doing concerts. In the end, I couldn't do my concert because of my condition and since Mogens was here, I asked him to be a guest artist in my place.

After the show, we invited him to come to the house and I didn't think anything of it. We ordered some pizza and that was it. It was the American way, a completely "off the cuff" type of thing. Then, a few years later I was in Denmark and I met Mogens again. He came up to me and said, "This is the lady that made me to eat in her kitchen." I'll never forget that! I said to him, "Well, when we invite someone, that is how we do it," and at the time with my condition, I couldn't do more.

Q. How many performances do you estimate to have made during your career?

A. Just thousands. These included several a month; solos; concerts.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 9

Q. In addition to your outstanding performance, composing, and teaching skills, you have also been quite active in several other areas, including the organizations. Can you tell us a little bit about your involvement with the AAA and when this began?

A. The AAA has been a very important part of my life. I was a student member in the early 1950s because Charlie Nunzio was a founding member. Frosini was very involved as well, so that put me right in there, too! If they weren't, I wouldn't have known about it.

I was elected to the AAA Board of Governors in 1955. The ones who came in with me were Marcello Roviario and Carmen Carrozza. Tony Ettore was a little later. During the 60s, I was elected Secretary and to other positions of office, and then in 1970, I was elected President. I was re-elected President twice since then.

It's also very interesting that I was the first woman president of the AAA. This made all the newspapers. At this time in 1970, it was still not that common that women were getting involved in national organizations of this scope.

During my presidency, I managed to govern over several of the contests, including the one in Nashville, where we had an orchestra of 1,000 accordionists play. Then we had another big contest in Hershey, Pennsylvania and one in Boston in 1984.

Q. During your career, you have also been extremely active on the international scene. You are by far the longest serving Confédération Internationale des Accordeonistes (CIA) officer from the United States, which included 16 years as a Vice President. When did you first attend a CIA event?

A. The first one was in 1957 in Saarbrücken, Germany, and in fact, I wound up judging it. I don't think they were too happy! At that time, they didn't want a woman judging.

We had Ronny Sweetz as our contestant and in fact, he actually won the Coupe Mondiale. After this, I started going more often, and then when I became President of the AAA, I would attend every year. I became Vice President of the CIA in 1974 and remained in that position for 16 years. It was very interesting to become involved with a group like the CIA that was dealing with international issues, and therefore was different from the American group.

This was an interesting and exciting time for the CIA.

Q. At a time before email, you spent much time corresponding with international dignitaries from around the world, conducting the business of the CIA. Do you have any memories from this time that you would like to share?

A. I always think an interesting one was Lech Puchnowski. He was always very important in the CIA. We would often lock horns, but we were not enemies. We both had one goal and that was to improve the competition of the CIA. Another interesting, fascinating personality from that time was Yuri Kolobokov. He was extremely interesting, too. He was always with his little camera, and he was quite the player. He was during the early 70's, at the time when there were always the KGB around.



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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 10

We worked hard to try and bring things to a head at our meetings. Everyone was quite strong, and so we either tried to bring things to a vote or matters would be shelved. At that time, they were not used to a woman being so strong.

We would go to both the winter and summer CIA congresses. There was so much correspondence and it required so much diplomacy.



Q. What are your views on an organization such as the Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA) and the importance it plays in the international music scene?

A. I think it is very important to have an organization such as the CIA. They set the criteria and goals for the competitions. As an organization, I think the CIA is doing very fine work. I think they have a very dedicated president! I think the CIA has come a very long way.

I believe that the various CIA member countries should continue their work commissioning new works for the accordion, as it enables us to see what is happening with the accordion in the various parts of the world. This will continually expand our accordion library. Maybe even a prize could be offered as an incentive for more works.

Q. You have seen the CIA Coupe Mondiale develop over many years. What are your views on the current competitions?

A. Sometimes I'm not always in agreement with the selection of the (Coupe Mondiale) test pieces. I would like to see them choose a more melodic type of test piece, rather than the very contemporary pieces that they have sometimes. On the home front, I think it's very hard for our American students to cope with some of these new works.

If there is one thing I would comment on, it would be the program content. I would like to see more variety in the programs in all sections. With the entertainment category, I really like this a lot, but the problem is that the word "entertainment" varies so much across the various countries. What is entertainment in the US isn't necessarily the same in Europe. This is something that we are trying to address by offering suggestions as to the possible styles of music.

The CIA Coupe Mondiale the way it is today is quite ambitious having so many categories and various requirements. However, as far as the program goes, it's pretty common today with the Tchaikovsky and other big International competitions, as they all require pretty lengthy programs as well, so we are on

a par in that respect.

We are looking forward to the Coupe Mondiale in Washington, DC in 2007. We will work together and get it going.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 11

Q. As a result of your long-time association with the Confédération Internationale des Accordéonistes (CIA) and the contacts you made, you had personally collected documents pertaining to the history of the organization ranging from 1953 to today. Your generous donation of this collection to the CIA enabled them to get the CIA Archive project off the ground. How important is it to preserve these documents and the history of the organization?

A. I think it's very important. After all, what is history? It is documents! Without them, it's just a bunch of hearsay. Here, we are fortunate enough to be able to look up things and see when and where they were said, and so I think it's very important.

Today, with modern communication methods such as email and instant messenger, I think someone has to be appointed to make hard copies of all those documents. I've thought of this many times, not only with the CIA, but also the AAA and ATG, as we are losing many, many documents. We push "delete" and that is the end of it. Most of the correspondence would be with the officers of the organizations, so they should be obtainable and therefore should be printed and preserved for historical purposes as a Word document, for example.



Q. What non-accordion music do you most like to listen to?

A. I really love Latin music and the symphony. If I really answer you, as to what music I enjoy the most, it is the music that I am playing at the time. I enjoy it all. If it's good, it is good!

Q. What other interests and hobbies besides music do you have?

A. I used to play golf. And I love needlepoint. You can see I have some hanging on the wall. I also love boating.

Q. What do you regard as your greatest achievement?

A. I am most proud of the work done with the national competitions, where I was able to benefit a tremendous amount of people. With one competition, I flew down to Nashville with Lana Gore. We met with her uncle who worked with one of the TV stations and had invited us down there. The three of us looked everything over, and we coordinated the entire thing and made the contest together. That was a joint effort.

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Maddalena Belfiore Interview continued - page 12

We also had a public relations guy who was very, very good and came into it as well. He managed to coordinate the big publicity and the event where I conducted 1,000 accordionists playing the Tennessee state song, "The Tennessee Waltz," from a cherry picker.

It was in 1980, because I remember when I was in Australia later that year after the Coupe Mondiale in Auckland, New Zealand, and Elsie Brandman from the Australian Society of Accordionists said that she had seen me on television in Australia, conducting this massive festival orchestra in Nashville. It had been broadcast around the world by the ABC News affiliate.

("The Tennessee Waltz" was written by Redd Stewart with Pee Wee King in 1948. King & Stewart decided to write the song after hearing Bill Monroe's Kentucky Waltz on the radio. Stewart emptied a matchbox and tore it open to write down the song. In 1951, Patti Page took "The Tennessee Waltz" to No.1 on the Pop chart, which also became a Top 3 Country hit. It went on to sell over 6 million copies. In 1965, "The Tennessee Waltz" was officially proclaimed by Governor Frank Clement as the Tennessee state song. Both Redd Stewart [May 27, 1923 - August 2, 2003] and Pee Wee King [February 18, 1914 - March 7, 2000] attended the unique AAA mass accordion orchestra performance of their number one hit, conducted by Maddalena Belfiore.)

Q. What are your thoughts regarding competitions?

A. Competitions are good, as they give students the incentive to practice. It shouldn't be about putting all the emphasis on winning or losing, but by going into a competition they learn music! They have to learn their one, two, or three pieces. It provides a helpful purpose to the lessons: to play their music and to play it well.

There are some students who have a very difficult time performing, but you should never underplay that student, as no matter how poor they may do in the competition in regards to their placing, they have set a goal for themselves. Maybe they just learnt the piece, maybe they just memorized it, or maybe they didn't, but the competition goal definitely served a purpose, and that is what I think is so important...that ultimately it did serve a purpose!

Q. What musical advice do you have for aspiring accordionists?

A. Listen to your teacher, and very important - practice! You have to have goals. Also, what happens today (different from when I studied) is that no one has a chance to play anyplace. I used to play at all these clubs and organizations, and that doesn't happen so much anymore, I feel. I don't get calls at the studio like I used to asking for performers. It does happen, of course, but not like it used to. Now if they get anyone, they get a group of entertainers, rather than a student soloist.



Maybe the teachers could help do more to promote it. We used to play anyplace we could. It was all part of the teaching and learning process. Kids going out to play publicly is probably the best lesson they could ever learn!

Students learn from competitions, also, but to have a "goal" of learning to play something and playing it well, that's what is important...to have that goal!