



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Accordionly Fine

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August 14, 2011

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, I took to the streets of Wallace, Idaho, to attend a festival that has been on my bucket list since I watched my first Lawrence Welk show in the 1950s: an accordion concert; even better, a three-day accordion festival!



In those early days of my life, I was impressed with Lawrence's playing of the accordion, as well as his funky, execution of the waltz. Later in his career, he delegated his accordion playing to others. But for a while, accordion-wise, he was the main man, as seen in this figure.¹

About his waltz: I did not understand it then. I do not understand it today. Lawrence did not really do a one-two-three foot movement to the waltz. He did a modified Polish Polka shuffle of a-ONE-and'a TWO and'a THREE foot movement. If you're going to waltz, then waltz! Don't Polack-around.

About the accordion: In my younger days in New Mexico's cowboy country, this musical instrument was considered...well, less than manly. It was seldom listened-to--and especially, not danced-to. It was a hokey contrivance from back east. Or worse, from somewhere in the deep recesses of that part of Europe that bred dark, scowling-looking people.

And more: Did you ever see an accordion in a Gene Autry Show? Roy Rogers? Whip Wilson? I'm told Hop-Along-Cassidy had an accordion player in one of his movies. But after all, Hop-Along was not called Hop-Along for nothing.

Anyway, I was conditioned to like the accordion as a youngster because my stepmom, Gayle, played the thing and gave me accordion-playing lessons. I loved that woman dearly. For that reason, I gave-in and let her coax me into the mysteries of the accordion.

With one condition: No citizen in my hometown could bear witness to my having that sissy wind box strapped around me. Thus the (few) accordion lessons between my stepmom and me were conducted in secret.

This is the first time I have come out of the accordion closet: So I now declare: ***Once, many years ago, in a moment of weakness, I played the accordion!***

There, I feel better. How about you with your flutes?

By the way, if you suffer from repressed agonies (musical or otherwise), just let it hang out. It's now the thing to do. Dr. Phil and subsequent endorsements will provide the needed palliatives.

¹ From Wikipedia.

The Accordion Festival

This event was not just a regular run-of-the-mill accordion festival. Rather, it was the Historic Wallace Accordion Festival of 2011. It ran for three days.

Fantastic. Just think, three days of uninterrupted accordion music. The town’s citizens must have been delirious about their good luck to land this festival in middle of their small town. Wallace is not a big burg. It sits in a valley between two mountains. Sounds resonate back and forth between and around the streets, and into the homes. On this week-end, accordion music was everywhere. “Edelweiss” found its way into every nook and cranny of Wallace’s aural canals.

But the music was accompanied with good cheer, as seen in these flyers and signs:



Taking a break from several concerts that were going-on in empty stores around the square (empty: courtesy of wisdoms from Congress, the White House, and Wall Street), I found a café. Upon entering:

- Me: “Are you serving breakfast?”
- Waitress: “Depends?”
- “Depends on what?”
- “You’a accordion player?”

Trust me folks, this would never happen in Lubbock, Texas. But being hungry, I kept my wits and lied in order to get some donuts.

- “Yes, and I can play ‘Home on the Range’ with my eyes shut.”
- “Take that booth over there, honey.”

Three Days of Accordion Music

To be lulled to sleep to “The Blue Danube Waltz,” all done to dozens of accordions. To be awakened by “The Blue Danube Waltz” to the same group of instruments. To...

It’s done. It was fun. Here’s the wrap:

Something is Missing

I favor protests. I admire protest music. But I wish more of the singers who chant their protests were really oppressed people, and not middle-class, wannabe downtroddens. Nonetheless, most

of them are making statements and singing protest songs against the status-quo. As of this writing, the status-quo is not serving American citizens well.

Still, and in spite of the up-heaveals going-on in Greece, the incantations on the streets around “Wall Street,” and the tea baggers’ stridencies, I miss the warmth that comes from the music of the accordion. The very nature of its chords--- its musical tones---convey a sense of serenity.

Perhaps that is why the accordion has never found its way into the mainstream of American urban life. It’s not violent enough. Perhaps that is why it will never be part of the American urban landscape. Perhaps the popularity of the accordion in parts of America is owed to an acknowledgment that parts of us can actually be serene.

I’ve made fun of the accordion in this report. Truth is, I love the accordion. And I love the woman who had me play it in the secret cloister of our home.