



THE REED

March, 2006

Newsletter of The Garden State Harmonica Club, Inc.

P.O. Box 122, Ridgewood, NJ 07451

"For the Elevation and Advancement of the Harmonica"

We meet on the second Friday of each month, at 7:30 p.m., at The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
Maywood and Taplin Aves., Maywood, NJ ● email: jbgbndlb @ aol.com

Next meeting: Friday, Mar. 10, '06

Deadline For Reed Articles...23rd of each month

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We Blow Off Steam

When your editor agreed to produce *The REED*, he stated, loud and clear (loudly and clearly would be better grammar!), that he would only edit, *not* write, this newsletter. He stated that, if he did not get input, there would be no output.

In other words, we declared that it would be up to members to provide the material that we would publish. However, it hasn't worked out quite that way. With one or two notable exceptions, we get no input, and have to fall back on stuff we have collected over the years or that we find here and there, from time to time. As in the last issue and this one, Stan Harper has sent letters, and we have pestered some others, But the amount of stuff we get is pitifully small. If your editor can spot things to put into *The REED*, why can't you other members? We don't have any special tricks for finding items; we just keep our eyes open. Remember, YOU members are the backbone of the GSHC. It's *your* club.

Don't leave the newsletter, or the picnic, of the festival to others.

If you want these things to continue, you must get involved! You can, and should, help!

Let's Hear It for Hibler!

Bob Hibler is one of the big exceptions to our gripe at the left.

Bob has been doing a yeoman job seeking publicity for the club in local journals. This is no easy task, and it's too early to know what success he will have, but we're delighted to note that he is among those hard-working members who are doing something to advance the GSHC. Our somewhat battered editorial hat is off to him!

Doo Wop, Doo Wop, Due Up!

March (that's this month!) is the last month for paying your 2006 dues. That means, among other things, that this is the last *REED* you recalcitrant ones will get. (No wise cracks!)

If you have not sent your dues, please do it now. They're still \$20, and are payable by March 31st.

By the way, when you send in your dues, please remember that we also need the Renewal Form on page 6, to make sure you are credited for having paid. **NOTE:** If you have paid, and did not get your new Membership Card in a couple of weeks, please call Andrew Menasian at 201-261-1290.



Little Lady in Space

The Little Lady and jingle bells above are on display in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington, DC. They are souvenirs of the December, 1965 rendezvous between Gemini 6, bearing Walter P. Schirra, and Gemini 7, with Frank Borman and Jim Lovell aboard. (The ships maneuvered to within a few feet of one another.)

Next day, December 16, Stafford and Schirra launched a Christmas-oriented spoof of their own, stating that they had detected a "UFO" in a polar orbit, driven by a man in a red suit, and pulled by eight other "UFOs". They then proceeded to broadcast "Jingle Bells" on the Little Lady harmonica, accompanied by the tinkling of the jingle bells in the picture. (The harmonica-playing astronaut was "Wally" Schirra, who dreamed up the stunt.)

Stafford mentioned that the ground control per-

sonnel got a bit nervous when they heard about the UFOs, until they realized that it was all a gag.

Margaret A. Weitekamp, museum curator, reports that these were the first musical instruments played in space. We owe her a vote of thanks for including the harmonica among musical instruments...not everybody does!

While it was fairly common for astronauts to carry small items to use as souvenirs or presents, these items, plus the Santa Claus routine, certainly were the first of their kind.

(We meant to use this in our December issue, but something came up [we forget what] that used up the space.)

By the way, our astronauts missed an opportunity, if they didn't play "Lady of Space, We adore You".



Pete Pedersen...Episode 2

Well, girls and boys, here we are again, with another thrilling installment of Jim Scancarelli's "Pete Pedersen meets the High-Schoolers" or maybe it's vice-versa? When last we met our hero, he was hiding beyond some trees and making music with the mouth organ. Now we see that he has been overheard, and that the kids don't appreciate the privilege they are enjoying, that of hearing an informal concert by one of the harmonica's greats. Instead of being grateful, they politely ask him to stop.

He is tolerant, however, and makes a humorous response. (We presume that the look on the girl's face is due to the pun; it certainly can't be due to Pete's playing!) What will happen next? Will Pete convert them? Will they all learn to play harmonica? Will they form a harmonica band? Will they trade in their automobiles to buy chord and bass harmonicas? Will it all end happily? It's a situation fraught with uncertainty. Watch for further developments next month!

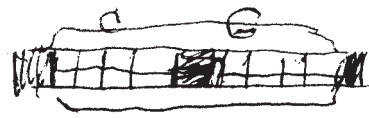
A chat (really, via postal mail) with Stan Harper

It would really be terrific if we could get some of the harmonica greats to rotate the writing of a monthly guest column. These guys have such marvelous memories...things that should be preserved... and where better than in the pages of *The REED*?

For instance, we recently queried Stan Harper about a few historical points, and here's how he answered.

REED: You told us that Fuzzy Feldman had one of the original 48 chords, but cut it up because he didn't like its size.

STAN: Fuzzy had the chord cut up for him. Minevitch harmonicas were just being manufactured in Germany (I forget the name of the company that made them). They made little covers for the pieces of the chord. A little later the company made "Blue Rhythm Band harmonicas (octave tuned like Hohner's Auto Valve Harp). For Fuzzy, the company tuned them like the chord.



Stan's sketch of a ten-hole "Blue Rhythm Band" harmonica, tuned to two four-hole chords.

They made a complete set with all the chords, and Minevitch had them put on a paddle wheel. Fuzzy never liked it--he took them off the wheel and used them individually, along with his Venetas, which he favored. They also made 3-1/2 in. diminished chromatics for him.



A "Vineta": The small group of holes plays bass notes; the large group, chords. This is a rather elementary instrument but, presumably, Fuzzy Feldman had them tuned to various keys though they were not offered to the general public. Don't ask us where they got the name "Vineta"!

REED: Diminished in more ways than one, no doubt. Only 3-1/2 inches long and they probably played dim. 7th chords, right Stan? By the way, the box of the old Hohner pushbutton Chromatic called it "The first practical one". Does that mean that there was another kind before that?

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More Harmonica from Frank Capra

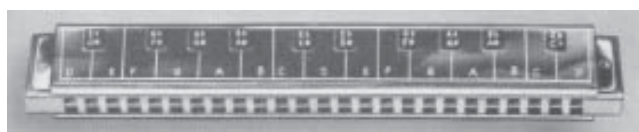
Maybe director Frank Capra had a soft spot for the harmonica. As we noted in the February, 2005 issue, he had Edward Arnold and Lionel Barrymore play a duet in the film "You Can't Take it with You". In "Meet John Doe", he brings it in again. Now, minor league pitcher Gary Cooper, invalidated by an injured arm, goes on the tramp with Walter Brennan. They are brought together by the fact that they both play, not musical instruments, but "doo-hickeys"...Cooper the harmonica and Brennan the ocarina. As in the previous film, the playing is not of the highest order, but it's nice to see the instrument featured at all. Our favorite part of the film has nothing to do with the harmonica; it's Brennan's speech about the drawbacks to a conventional life (as distinct from that of the hobo): the need for insurance, a driver's license, gas and oil...funny because he (or, rather, the film's writer) little suspected what lay ahead: photo IDs, credit cards, debit cards, health insurance, 401Ks, retinal scans, metal detectors, seat belts, motorcycle helmets, and more to come, no doubt.



Stan continued

Stan: The photo of the early chromatic shown in the February REED is the first commercial one. The box called it "The first practical" one because it was the first with a button. Hohner made a Polyphonia before the button type, so they evidently considered the button type to be the first practical one.

REED: We somehow never suspected that the Polyphonia pre-dated the pushbutton type.



A "Polyphonia" or "Polly": The notes are simply arranged in the order of a chromatic scale. This is a No. 5, but there's a great Minevitch recording of Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in C# Minor* on the low-pitched No. 7.

Your editor loves Pollys, but they are hard to play well (even though the basic idea seems simplicity itself!). And don't ask us where they got the name "Polyphonia" either!

Stan: The next version of the pushbutton type they called "The first and only". A label on the inside of the box gave instructions on how to free the slide, using inverted English, from the German, e.g. "When should stick the slide...".

REED: Many years ago, after innumerable visits to the Hohner offices at 351 Fourth Ave., (New York) we were surprised to finally meet an actual mem-

ber of the Hohner family, Frank Hohner. Do you know anything about him?

Stan: At one time, you could not have a Hohner agency unless you were a member of the family. Frank Hohner was in charge of the South American agency before New York.

REED: We were talking about the surprising number of players who played "left-handed", with the low notes to the right, including Johnny Puleo, Ernie Morris, and our good friend Cham-Ber Huang...though Cham-Ber has the button switched, so you don't notice it unless you watch him closely.

Stan: Players I know who played left-handed include Leo Diamond and Alan Pogson, who even played chord left-handed.

REED: You've previously told us something of your experiences during WWII, in the Pacific. Can you add anything?

Stan: While stationed in Honolulu, I was a big favorite of General Robert C. Richardson, head of the entire Central Pacific Command. and of Admiral Chester Nimitz. Whenever the general had a big affair for world dignitaries in his home, I was invited to play. After the performance, the general always invited me to join the party. He was former commandant of West Point and the largest

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Stan concluded

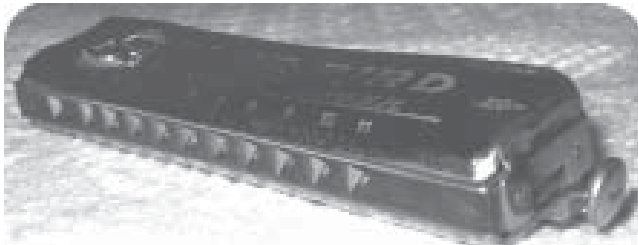
stockholder in 20th Century Fox. I was only a PFC but the general regarded me as an artist, and saw no uniform.

At one party, I met Under Secretary of War Patterson. He asked me what I was doing to get harmonicas. I told him that I couldn't get any (this was wartime) and that mine were held together with spit and chewing gum. I went on to say that just one month before, on Guam, I had been offered \$800 for an old one, and wouldn't sell it.

He told me that [a certain American oil company] was swapping the Nazi oil for harmonicas through South America, and that a British Man of War had knocked over a whole shipment. They were, he said, in a Bermuda warehouse. He asked me to write down what kind I used.

Four months later I received a crate of Supers. Not one said "Made in Germany". The said "Fabbrica Allemagna" on the cover tab.

When they got too flat for professional stage use, I gave them to guys in hospitals.



Mouth Organ Mystery

Anybody know anything about the very unusual harmonica above? It's marked "Blue Bird New World Chromatic Vamper". As the pictures show, it has eleven holes and a button, but no metal mouthpiece. Next to the button it has an arrow, and says "Push Fast".

Last time we checked, it belonged to a gentleman who is a collector, but not really a player. We asked him about it, but he couldn't enlighten us very much.

We'd love to hear from anyone who can tell us what it was for, and how it how it worked!

Dues (\$20) are due!

(Continued from page 1)

Please note!! Those who joined the club after Oct. 1st, and paid 2005 dues, need not pay again until 2007.

A final word: As we said last month, our membership has been slipping of late; in 2004 we ended up with 97 members. If you know of anyone who is interested in the harmonica, whether beginner or expert, please pass the word along. Maybe we can reverse this discouraging trend.

If you haven't sent in your dues,
please be sure to use the form
on the reverse side and

Do It Now!

News of Alan Pogson...

As we go to press, we learn that harmonica star Alan Pogson has had a fall, which sounds like nothing, but which can be serious when you're 90. Our best wishes go out to him; we hope he'll be as comfortable as possible while recovering..

March Birthdays

Frank Grova	Victor Fabano
Marge Smolinski	Harry Feinberg
Rick Mieles	Pete Jay
Andrew Menasian	Dan Bauch
Nick Peetros	

Ernie Lakatos dies at age 78

Here, somewhat paraphrased, is an announcement of the death of Ernie Lakatos, originally written by George Miklas and passed along to us by Dotty and Laddie Pispecky. Ernie was obviously much beloved.

"The funeral home room was absolutely packed with musicians—accordionists, bassists, banjoists, clarinetists...Ernie's friends. He was a member of the Grammy Nominated 'Penn-Ohio Polka Pals'. "Among this crowd were five harmonica players, past and present members of the Steel Valley Harmonica Club—Herb Eck, Al Data, Bill Haydu, Don Klein, and myself. Ernie was an extraordinary chromatic harmonica player. I met Ernie when I first joined the Steel Valley Harmonica Club, at age 10. He was a positive influence to me in my early musical development, and often took time to show me his harmonica 'tricks'. Ernie was an entertainer through and through. On stage, he always wiggled some part of his body as he played

...sometimes his fingers, sometimes his touche (touché, George?), and sometimes both. He played a wide variety of popular songs, but he dearly loved polkas, waltzes, czardas, and other ethnic songs. Ernie loved his harmonica, and other harmonica players. He was frequently seen at festivals in Akron OH, at The Rubber Capital Harmonica Club; in Columbus OH, at the Buckeye State Harmonica Festival; and in Paramus NJ, at the Garden State Harmonica Club Festival.

"There was a harmonica memorial to Ernie at the funeral home, featuring a trio of Al Data, chord; Herb Eck, chromatic; and me, George Miklas, bass. We played Ernie's favorites including *Peg O' My Heart*, *Spanish Eyes*, *Strangers In The Night*, *TicToc Polka*, and the *Just Because Polka*. May Ernie rest in peace."

Dotty adds: "Ernie attended many of our Festivals, always playing my favorite: *'Blue Skirt Waltz'*"

GSHC Dues Renewal Form

New Member Renewal Cash Check

Please make checks out to GSHC and send to:

Garden State Harmonica Club
 Att: Membership
 P.O. Box 122,
 Ridgewood, NJ 07451

Your Name: _____

(If the information below has changed since last time, please print the proper corrections)

Address _____ Town _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

Birthday(**mo/day**) _____ / _____ Spouse's Name _____ Birthday(**mo/day**) _____ / _____

Occupation _____ Anniversary (**mo/day**) _____

Are you interested in joining a committee? If so, which? _____

For GSHC use only:

Membership _____ President _____ Reed _____ Sunshine _____