

These, and stories of unpaid bills, unscrupulous rivals, unreliable artists and other problems give a good idea how precarious things could be for a small record company, then and now. One reason for special interest in Trumpet today is the very high quality of its best recordings, especially those of Sonny Boy Williamson (Aleck Miller), whose voice and harmonica gained him an international reputation before his death in 1965. Even the truant Elmore James (d. 1963) is best remembered for “Dust my broom,” the single side he made for Trumpet in 1951. Bluesmen Willie Love and Luther Huff, the Hodges Brothers’ semi-grass band, and the Southern Sons gospel group were other standouts whose work combined to make the label – and its fascinating story – of continuing interest.

Marc Ryan has told the story well, unless you feel that his obvious affection for Lillian McMurry and her work gives a bias. Those, like me, who’ve heard the records probably won’t feel that way. I do fault the author for a flawed general grasp of recorded sound history: he has Polk Miller recording for Victor instead of Edison, Lucille Bogan’s ARC records appearing in 1928 instead of 1933, the Paramount company expiring in 1934 instead of 1932, the year of Speckled Red’s “Dirty dozens” as 1928 instead of 1929, and he describes western swing incorrectly and ungraciously as “a bastardized version of hillbilly music.”

These minor flaws don’t really detract from a good and otherwise thoroughly researched effort, which is enhanced by a painstaking discography and many good photos and graphics. And, as you might gather, the Trumpet/McMurry story itself is well told and of exceptional interest. *Reviewed by Dick Spottswood*

### ***Polka happiness.***

*By Charles Keil, Angeliki V. Keil and Dick Blau. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. 221 pp., notes, photos, name index, selected discography.*

Although recommending this book, I must acknowledge that some of my own work was drawn upon during its preparation, especially in a discussion of early recordings during the first chapter. I also had the pleasure of reviewing an earlier manuscript of this work several years ago and provided what I hoped were some useful criticisms and suggestions. One normally shouldn’t try to evaluate a work without greater distance from it than I can claim – but I do feel that it needs to be brought to wider attention, so I’ll try to be prepared for any conflict of interest charges that get tossed at me!

*Polka happiness* approaches the topic from within the tightly knit world of polka, with interviews, observations and discussions involving musicians, fans and event organizers. The title specifies the primary element polka is expected to provide to polka lovers, and the book’s many photos of smiling, perspiring participants eloquently underlines the theme.

But it would be misleading to say that it’s only about feeling good, though the authors treat the topic with thoughtfulness. There’s also a discussion of polka’s origins and development, its place in the broader spectrum of American ethnic music, and what polka means to the lives of musicians and others who derive at least a partial livelihood from it via radio, record production and retailing and connected promotional activities, and to the fans, whose support and enthusiasm is a requisite. Those who work in any area of music with limited public appeal will find much to empathize with in accounts of the meaning of polka music, polka dancing and polka ambience to the faithful, jokes and other disparagements from outsiders, shrinking numbers of follow-

ers and related issues. I'd be surprised if those involved with bluegrass, jazz, the renaissance revival and other minority genres didn't have comparable stories to tell.

An entire chapter deals with the rationale and founding of the International Polka Association in 1958, its development since, and discusses in detail the joint involvement of fans and professionals in its organizational structure and motivation. The IPA has proved to be a successful bastion against the incursions of rock and roll, television and the dispersal of the old urban ethnic communities, each of which has often threatened polka over the years, and the community integrity which polka represents. A subsequent chapter shows in part how it works, as one of the authors (Angeliki Keil) provides close-up coverage of a summer IPA convention in Milwaukee.

The book contains thoughtful interviews with surviving early figures like Max Ciesielski and Ed Krolikowski, a long chat with Li'l Wally (Jagiello), who revived polka in Chicago in the 1950s by stripping his music down to its emotional essentials, Happy Louie Dusseault and others who imported Wally's "honky" style into the north-east, Jimmy Maupin of Milwaukee who plays accordion in the distinctively midwestern Slovenian style, and many others with fascinating tales. The authors (as am I) are most enamored of the Chicago style which is traceable back to the early records of Frank Dukla and his contemporaries of the 1920s, through Li'l Wally to Eddie Blazonczyk, whose Versatones band was organized in the 1960s and remains pre-eminent today.

Sound recordings are part of the story too. Bands who played polkas appeared on records a hundred years ago; *polka* bands, like those of "Whoopee" John Wilfahrt, Ed Krolikowski, and Frank Dukla achieved prominence on records in the 1920s and after. Today's leaders, like Eddie Blazonczyk, Jimmy Sturr and Lenny Gomulka still rely on records, among other devices, to establish, enhance and extend professional reputations and opportunities.

Aside from Victor Greene's *Passion for polka* (University of California, 1992), there's not a lot of serious literature about polka – perhaps because even insiders shrink from thinking of their music as art. But it is, though it may not be constructed or perceived along the lines of classical models. *Polka happiness* treats its subject as though it were: carefully, thoughtfully and extensively, combining scholarly objectivity with personal enthusiasm. It is a convincing and excellent study of an important vernacular music. *Reviewed by Dick Spottswood*

### ***American Celebrity Recordings, 1900-1925. Revised Third Edition.***

*By Julian Morton Moses. Monarch Record Enterprises, 1993. 208 pp. \$12.95 plus \$2.00 shipping from Monarch Record Enterprises, 100 Highland Park Village, Dallas, TX 75205-2788.*

An old favorite is back, all dressed up in new clothes, in this third edition of *American Celebrity Recordings*. The 1936 original, titled *The Record Collector's Guide: American Celebrity Discs*, was a true pioneer, one of the first general discographies ever published. Revised in 1949 as *Collector's Guide to American Recordings 1895-1925*, and reprinted by Dover in 1977, it is a tattered standby on many vocal record collectors' shelves.

This is really a rather simple book, and that perhaps is the key to its longevity. It is basically a checklist to issued recordings by approximately 240 (mostly) vocal