

Thanks for the Music!



Thanks for the Memories!

*Vrazels' Polka Band
Retirement Dance Celebration
January 24, 2009
Mayborn Convention Center ☆ Temple, Texas*

Thanks for the Music! Thanks for the Memories!

**SP&ST joins fans from near and far
in expressing sincere thanks to
Vrazels' Polka Band**

**for 55 years of remaining true to the polka tradition,
keeping dancers on their feet and making people happy.**

**Thank you for making a positive difference
in the lives of the men, women, boys and girls
who have been touched by your music.**

Make yourself at home!

**The kitchen and bar will be open for the duration.
Enjoy the kolaches in the foyer while they last!**

Please know that today's event is being video recorded.

**No cameras or video cameras, please,
except for press and authorized personnel.**

The band will be available for photographs after the dance.

A DVD will be made of the event and will be for sale at a later date. If you are interested in purchasing one, please fill out the information form and when the DVD comes out, you will be notified. You will find this form at the back of the auditorium where you will also find all of the Vrazels recordings for sale. Buy one CD and get one free. LP Records and Videos are also on sale.

**Dance starts at 3 p.m.
Presentations and Toasts
at 4:30 p.m.**

To make a toast, please see Emcee Brian Vanicek.

Vrazels' Polka Band: Celebrating Life Through Music

After more than 3,000 performances and 55 years of making people happy, Vrazels' Polka Band members celebrate the band's retirement with family and friends. Making fans happy with music is a formula the Vrazels have mastered. With Anton, 81, on the accordion and Alfred, 68, in the role of band leader, the music has taken them and their six-member band to dance halls, folk festivals and country stores throughout the state and the nation.

So how did it all begin? Anton and Alfred Vrazel are the sons of the late Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Vrazel, Sr. and are lifelong residents of the Yarrellton-Marak communities near Cameron, Milam County, Texas. Their interest in music started early in life. At the age of ten, Alfred talked his parents into buying him his first accordion. He purchased a two-row Hohner Button accordion from Sears for \$32. Shortly thereafter, Anton began playing the piano accordion and Alfred switched to playing the tenor and alto saxophone and guitar. The band was originally known as *Vrazels' Playboys* and consisted of Alfred and his three cousins, Leo, Louis and Ladis Vrazel, with Anton joining a short time later. They began playing at small stores and halls including The Oscar Store near Temple; Three Oaks near Cameron; Country Bar & Grocery Store in Marak; Otto's Place in Taylor; The Wagon Wheel Inn in Beyersville;

Tom Sefcik Hall in Seaton and the SPJST Lodge 15 Hall in Buckholts. Some of their first engagements they received no regular salary — just small donations from appreciative listeners and dancers. Therein is rooted the origin of the Vrazel band motto "*playing for our friends.*"

It wasn't long before Alfred and Anton changed the name of the band to *Vrazels' Polka Band*. A third brother, Lawrence Vrazel, Jr. joined them playing drums for the next 12 years. The band started playing for larger crowds at the annual picnics at Moravian Hall in Corn Hill, Marak Parish in Marak, Flag Hall (SPJST Lodge 24) in Cyclone, Star Hall (SPJST Lodge 47) in Seaton and at the SPJST Lodge 15 Hall in Buckholts. Their popularity grew and the number of engagements began to increase rapidly. In recent years, the band performed approximately 50 engagements per year. In the early days, they used to perform more than 100 engagements per year!

On the Air

Only two years after band was organized, Radio Station KMIL 1330 A.M. in Cameron was established and the Vrazels' were engaged for a Sunday afternoon program. In the early years they all gathered at the radio station to do the show live and unrehearsed. The radio program

(Over, please)

**The sound they helped pioneer is a Lone Star state original,
crafted out of the Vrazel family's Moravian roots
mixed with the country of Texas.**

**Indeed, heritage is an important ingredient of successful
music-making according to Alfred Vrazel. Or as he puts it:**

**"The main thing is be yourself and do your own thing,
and never forget where you came from."**

—*"The Last Oom-Pah," Houston-Chronicle
Sunday, December 28, 2008*

was initially only 30 minutes long, but due to its popularity it was increased to two hours and 15 minutes. It is now heard every Sunday afternoon from 12:15 to 2:30 p.m. and is in its 53rd year of continuous broadcasting. It is believed to be the longest running weekly polka radio program in the Nation. Alfred has always served as host on the program and while the band will retire, Alfred will continue to host his Sunday afternoon radio polka show.

The members have always felt very close to their audience when they play. They played for the people and not for themselves. Although some of the musicians read music, they all played by ear and not by notes and were self-taught. Their music renditions were frequently emulated by other polka musicians. Alfred has been the Band Leader and the Master of Ceremonies and Announcer at all dances and appearances. His joyful and easygoing manner helped to establish the feeling of friendship between the band and their audience. Anton has served as the Band Manager and took care of the business, sales and bookings.

Present musicians are: Thomas Strmiska of Yarrellton, who is featured on the drums and vocals and has been with the band for 35 years and is the son-in-law of Alfred. Albert Heselmeyer of Taylor, who is featured on bass, and has been with the band for 32 years. David Trojacek of Ennis, who is featured on saxophone, guitar and vocals and has been with the band for 10 years. Patrick Strmiska plays lead, rhythm and steel guitar and vocals and he has been with the band for a total of 17 years.

The Vrazels' Polka Band celebrated their 25th Anniversary at the Cultural Activities Center in Temple, Texas; their 40th, 45th and 50th Anniversary at Seaton Star Hall (SPJST Lodge 47) — all with overflow crowds. The band made their first recording in 1959 and has recorded since that time twenty 45 RPM records, nine nine-track tapes, 13 long-play albums; two videos, six cassettes and 10 CDs. On occasion, Jessica Strmiska sings along in both the English and Czech language. She is featured on Volume 1 of the two videos (she was 5 years old at that time). Her brother, Matthew, also performs with the band occasionally on the

drums. They are the children of Thomas and Cindy and the grandchildren of Alfred.

Over the Years

Vrazels' Polka Band was chosen by Texas Folklife Resources - Accordion Kings to represent traditional Texas - Czech music. Pat Jasper, former Director of the organization, considers them to be "among the best." Their Czech repertoire is extensive. The Vrazels have performed for the Texas Folklife Resources - Accordion Kings Festival held in Austin, Dallas, Eagle Pass, Houston and Plano. Their out-of-state performances representing Czech polka music from Texas include: 1976 - The Smithsonian Institution of American Folklife Bicentennial Celebration in Washington, D.C.; 1991 - Texas Festival at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; 1992 - Barns of the Wolf Trap Foundation in Vienna, Virginia; as well as performances in Tucson, Arizona; Wichita, Kansas; Las Vegas, Nevada; a Caribbean Cruise and an Alaskan Cruise.

The Vrazels have been honored as recipients of the following awards: 1991 - Band of the Year; 1992 - Alfred - Lifetime Achievement to Texas Polka Disc Jockey for Programming Polka Music for the Longest Period of Years Uninterrupted - KMIL-1330, Cameron, Texas; Most Requested Band; Song of the Year (*Once on a Sunday* - Waltz); George Strmiska - String Instrumentalist of the Year; 1993 - Band of the Year; Song of the Year (*From Tabor to Us* - Polka); Alfred Vrazel - Vocalist of the Year; 1995 - The Prestigious European American Music Award - Presented in Las Vegas, Nevada; 1996 - Song of the Year (*No One Knows* - Waltz); Alfred Vrazel - Vocalist of the Year. 2001 - Anton and Alfred were presented the World of Music Hall of Fame Award-presented in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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