

The American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress presents

**HOMEGROWN**  
2006  
*The Music of America*

Traditional music and dance "homegrown" in communities across the United States

**AN ACQUISITIONS & PRESENTATION PROJECT**

# **THE RIVER BOYS**

## **DUTCH HOP POLKA MUSIC**

**OF THE GERMANS FROM RUSSIA**

**FROM**

**SCOTTSBLUFF NEBRASKA AND  
NORTHEASTERN COLORADO**



**Wednesday  
June 21, 2006  
12 NOON - 1 PM**

**Coolidge Auditorium**

**Ground Floor,  
Thomas Jefferson Building  
Library of Congress**

**10 First Street, SE  
Washington, DC**



**FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Closest Metro Stop:  
Capitol South (orange and  
blue lines), located one block  
south of the Jefferson Building

Cosponsored with the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage

Request ADA accommodations five days in advance at (202) 707-6362 or ADA@loc.gov

For more information contact Thea Austen 202-707-1743

# THE RIVER BOYS

## DUTCH HOP POLKA MUSIC

### OF THE GERMANS FROM RUSSIA

#### FROM SCOTTSBLUFF NEBRASKA AND NORTHEASTERN COLORADO

The River Boys perform Dutch Hop, music and dance particular to the Volga Deutsch (Germans). This large group of Germans from Russia immigrated to the U.S. and Canada (primarily Great Plains states and Prairie provinces) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They came to this country from settlements along Russia's Volga River. The word "Dutch" is a misnomer that most likely came from a misunderstanding of the word "Deutsch". Many Germans from Russia say their ancestors deliberately ignored the misunderstanding because of the widespread anti-German sentiments they encountered during World War I. So, the music remains "Dutch Hop" to this day.

Definitely not your grandparents' polka, the Dutch Hop is upbeat, spirited dance music created for wedding dances, anniversaries, and other cultural celebrations. The music has continued for hundreds of years despite two major upheavals. The Volga Germans migrated to Russia in the late 1700s and from there immigrated to America between the mid-1800s and World War I. In both cases, these resilient settlers left homeland and kin to escape wars and famines, to seek better opportunities, and to maintain their culture. The German version of the hammered dulcimer ("hackbrett," meaning "chopping board" in English) went along with them. It is the signature instrument of Dutch Hop. The music and dance both combine German roots with distinct Slavic influences.

In Dutch Hop the hammered dulcimer is played in a unique manner and it is also the only one of the original instruments left in the typical modern-day Dutch Hop ensemble. Earlier groups in Russia and the U.S. usually consisted of a dulcimer, a string bass, two violins, and a clarinet. The versatile accordion became one of the lead instruments prior to the 1940s, supplanting the clarinet and violins. Gradually, the string bass has given way to a combination of trombone and electric bass.

Many Americans have preconceived notions about polka music. Stereotypes leap easily to mind. As Dr. Richard March, a Wisconsin folklorist and polka expert explains:

"The biggest misconception is that polka is nothing but idiotic, schlocky music. As in any musical genre, there are some corny, artistically weak performances. Often, it is precisely this kind of stuff that you see advertised on telemarketing commercials on late night TV. The good stuff doesn't get visibility beyond the communities where it is created."<sup>1</sup>

March says polka music is beginning to command more respect, and he enumerates the many wonderful regional polka traditions in the U.S., including the Dutch Hop bands of the western Great Plains. Polkas show up in many other diverse traditions, such as Mexican conjunto, Irish music, and the repertoires of contemporary rock and country bands. Each of these settings features polkas as different from one another as the cultures that have shaped them.

As played by The River Boys, the music features Bob Schmer

from Scottsbluff, Nebraska, on accordion and Dave Beitz from Platteville, Colorado, on hammered dulcimer. They trade off lead melodies. Jerry Hergenreder of Longmont, Colorado, adds fill-in notes on trombone and accentuates certain parts of the music. Steve Deines from Ault, Colorado, provides timing and reinforces the bouncy rhythm of the dance with his bass guitar. Waltzes and dushes are also important traditional forms of the music. Dushes are special German folk songs that often were sung in German, accompanied by a toast to honor the bride, the groom, and other close relatives at the wedding celebration. Nowadays, fewer people know the German words to the old songs, but a typical Dutch Hop band might mix in some country western waltzes, two steps, and other popular varieties of dance music to suit their audiences and the occasion.

Bob Schmer began playing accordion when he was twelve. He learned to play Dutch Hop tunes by ear from older Nebraska musicians. In his earlier band, the Polka Playboys, Bob played with the late Albert Fahlbusch, winner of a 1984 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship for both building and playing the hammered dulcimer. The Playboys received a Nebraska Governor's Arts Award in 1992.

Both Dave Beitz and Steve Deines come from families of Dutch Hop musicians, and Dave writes original tunes in the tradition. Steve and Jerry Hergenreder add vocals to some of the numbers. The families and friends of the band have kindly consented to demonstrate the authentic Dutch Hop dance step. All of the River Boys are veteran musicians whose love for the music and skill in performing it are readily apparent.

For more information on The River Boys, contact Gwen Meister at 402-420-5442 or [plainsculture@inebraska.com](mailto:plainsculture@inebraska.com), or Robert Schmer at 308-635-0485 or [rschmer54@hotmail.com](mailto:rschmer54@hotmail.com)

Gwen K. Meister  
Executive Director  
Nebraska Folklife Network, Inc.  
Lincoln Nebraska

1. Excerpt from "Deeper Polka" a Portal Wisconsin on-line chat. Dated Thursday, July 10, 2002  
[http://www.portalwisconsin.org/resources\\_chat.cfm?chat=1](http://www.portalwisconsin.org/resources_chat.cfm?chat=1)

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Check out our web site [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife)

