

## LOU JACKLICH: Teacher-Performer-Electronic Accordion Pioneer

Veteran accordionist, Lou Jacklich, started with the accordion at the age of 7 (1935) under the guidance of his father, Louis G. Jacklich and his uncle, Rudolph Jacklich, who both played the instrument. Lou's first instructor was Mr. H. Verwer from Holland. Frank Ivica of Oakland, California was responsible for the fine and delicate style of phrasing that Lou uses in classical interpretation. (In those days, accordion music was scarce; 90% of the music used was for piano.)

At age 10 in 1940, Lou played solo accordion with the National Institute of Music and Arts annual junior musicians' concert comprised of 5000 pupils from the West Coast (including Canada) at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For two years in his early teens Lou took soprano singing lessons from vocal teacher, Patricia Reynolds, and sang live on Saturdays on radio KLS 1280 kc (the Warner Brothers' station which later became KWBR, then KDIA) in Oakland. He sang show tunes (e.g., "Ol' Man River," "Green Eyed Dragon," "Begin the Beguine," etc.) and war tunes (e.g., "[There'll be Bluebirds Over] The White Cliffs of Dover," "Sunday, Monday or Always," "Johnny Got a Zero," etc.). Some tunes were sung with piano accompaniment while others he accompanied himself on the accordion. In high school, his best friend advised him to stick with the accordion, and he stopped singing. By 14 years old, Lou made the life-changing decision to pursue a career as a professional accordionist; the only job he has ever held.

When he was 16 years old, Orlando Meni-Ketti who had a huge accordion store on Clay St. in Oakland offered Lou a teaching job with 30 students. Lou had a car and made house calls in the San Francisco Bay Area. He also learned how to give demonstrations and sell accordions. As of 2015 Lou has taught over 1,000 accordion students; students continue to seek him as an instructor.

His career as a professional accordionist was also set at 16 years old when Lou joined the Musicians Union in order to play the Orpheum Circuit (vaudeville), starting in Portland, Oregon and southward along the West Coast. His first steady job was at Stumble Down Inn in Daly City, California. He went on to perform with two-year stints in California at the: Cabaña Hotel (once described by *Life Magazine* as "one of the best hotels on the West Coast") in Palo Alto, Santa Clara Marriott Hotel (where he strolled for four hours with two other professional violinists during Sunday brunch), San Jose Country Club, and Prime Rib restaurant in San Lorenzo. (Lou was the leader with the trio at the Marriott; he played a lot of solos and the violinists filled in. The trio was so professional that they never rehearsed or announced a tune.)

Back in his college days at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) he studied counterpoint, theory, conducting and psychology of music. Some of the other instruments which he studied include: piano, organ, trumpet, clarinet, saxophone, violin, steel guitar and drums. This knowledge was a great asset in writing arrangements for his combo. They were booked for radio, clubs and USO tours throughout the country. He was the arranger for his accordion orchestras.



Lou was very fortunate to solo with Horace Heidt and achieved much experience in the field.

He joined the U.S. Navy and served during the Korean War.

During his career he was also a member of the American Accordionist's Association (AAA) and Accordionists and Teachers Guild, International (ATG).

In Castro Valley, California Lou formed an accordion school called, "The Jacklich School of Music" which had grown to over 400 students. The School was affiliated with San Lorenzo Music Co. which offered all types of instruction for musical instruments. From this relationship he was able to form combos and bands of mixed instruments featuring the accordion in each. The School had four accordion bands, and 19 combos. There were seven adult teachers who studied under Lou.

Selling music was one of many avenues that Lou endeavored as a professional musician to earn a living. In 1959 Lou-Rich Publications was formed by Lou Jacklich and Richard Whitmire in San Lorenzo. They felt the need in the school for new and different student material for guitar and accordions. Lou-Rich Publications also sponsored the Composers Workshop, a successful program which enabled student to write and compose their own music. The musical thought was by the student and the construction, harmony and timing were worked out in a composers workshop taught by Lou.

The accordion has an important part in the history of Scandinavian music. The accordion is considered traditional in the Scandinavian culture. Whenever Scandinavian music is played, you are likely to find the accordion. Lou says that "Scandinavian music is a challenge to any accordionist due to the varied speeds and syncopation in the music." He and his students performed on Saturdays on a Scandinavian radio show in San Jose to help promote dances at the Jenny Lind Hall.

The year, 1960 (at the age of 32 and having been a professional accordionist for half his life) was especially busy for Lou. He recorded his first dance music album called, "Scandinavian Festival Album" with the Pete Jensen Combo for Vi-tones Records. The album consisted of waltzes, schottisches, polkas, and Swedish hambos. The combo also recorded "Scandinavian Festival Album No. 2" and an album, "Music from the 20's." These albums were cut by Capitol Records of Hollywood.

More importantly in 1960, Lou (with the reputation as an excellent instructor and well-known performer in demand) had the opportunity to go in a new direction as an early pioneer playing an electronic accordion on the West Coast. One day he showed up at a job and was introduced to Ken Lovell who invented an organ attachment for the accordion. Lou was expected to perform on the spot with the organ attachment on a La Melodiosa accordion. The separate Lovell organ attachment and tube amplifier wired via a cable to the accordion enhanced the volume and versatility of new rhythms and added instrument sounds akin to an electronic organ were a novelty that Lou felt that he had to have in his act to distinguish himself from all other accordionists. That night he went home and told his wife, Phyllis, that he wanted to get the electronically equipped accordion, the first on the U.S. West Coast to his knowledge. But at the time it was prohibitively expensive at \$3,000. It was a major investment that branded his career as a pioneer with the electronic accordion. Lou had a specially designed La Melodiosa accordion which had 43 treble keys, and 140 bass buttons. He liked the La Melodiosa because it had the quietest bass mechanism he had ever played at that time.

After investing in the La Melodiosa and Lovell organ attachment, he sequestered himself for four to six hours a day for six months as he arranged over a dozen popular and accordion standards and a 17-minute act where he gave a demonstration of his unit and played a few selections from his arrangements. He continually experimented with creative ways to make his act unique. He had a bubble machine (that backfired on him on a windy day outdoors and made the keys slippery). There was an act in which the house lights went down and he had a unit the size of an early 60's television which pulsed with lights as he performed "Saber Dance"; unfortunately, the audience was fixated on the lights and did not realize that when the lights stopped, his piece was done. (The lights lasted for only one act.) In hindsight he admits that he should have instead had lights on the accordion. A highly successful finish to his act was his Americana medley of: "America the Beautiful," "Dixie," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," "Taps," and concluding with a dramatic rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in which he played and walked sideways in a subtle manner towards his amplifier to release a pin that unfurled the American flag at the end of his act. As a pioneer with one of the world's first electronic accordions in the early 1960's, Lou Jacklich's career soared on a fast track.

The public was so amazed with his performance on the electronic accordion that they thought that instead of his actually playing, there was a record inside the instrument. He had a television guest appearance on “The Al Collins Show” that aired on KGO-TV in San Francisco (the ABC affiliate). Lou had many requests for a record album. In 1962 he released his solo LP album, “Lou Jacklich Plays” via Capitol records and was probably one of the first accordion artists to record and sell an album (\$4US monaural and \$5US stereo) following his act. In those days, his type of music had to be under four minutes to be aired on the radio. The following popular accordion tunes Lou originally arranged and performed straight without any splices:

Side 1:

- Holiday for Strings
- España Cani
- Dance of the Hours
- Jalousie
- Kitten on the Keys
- Dizzy Fingers



Side 2:

- Who's Sorry Now (A La Shuffle)
- On the Trail
- The Flight of the Bumble Bee
- Malagueña
- Carnival of Venice
- Granada

Highlights of Lou's extraordinary accordion arrangements include:

1. *Holiday for Strings*: Reverberation was used to echo the sound that was built in the Lovell organ attachment.
2. *España Cani*: Reverberation produced an echo effect simulating the musical audio experience of being in the bull fight arena.
3. *Dance of the Hours*: Many tonal and accordion techniques were created to bring out the unique sounds and audio dimensions of this amazing artistic arrangement.
4. *Jalousie*: Sounds of the marimba were created via a knee vibrato technique.
5. *Kitten on the Keys*: A ping pong effect was created with the music alternating between stereo speakers.
6. *Dizzy Fingers*: An echo effect was created by first playing the accordion with the bellows, followed by the foot pedal which activated the Lovell organ attachment without the bellows.
7. *On the Trail*: The harmonica stood out also by applying the knee vibrato technique.
8. *Who's Sorry Now*: Hawaiian guitar and banjo sounds accented this lively rendition.
9. *Malagueña*: Via stereo, one side emphasized the accordion, while a symphony of sound occurred with both left (bass) and right (treble) sides playing together.

Lou's favorite selection is the “Flight of the Bumble Bee” (à la boogie) while the most challenging arrangement was “Dance of the Hours.”

“Lou Jacklich Plays” sounds fresh and modern a half century after its original recording. Lou’s interpretations, from “Kitten on the Keys” to “Granada,” combine improvisational brilliance with loyalty to the original melodic intent. If you hire Lou, expect him to be there early, ready for anything from Italian Opera to American blues. If you take lessons from Lou, he will draw upon his experiences to help you achieve your musical goals. Lou is uncompromising in his search for excellence, but also patient and practical in his approach to student concerns.

Scott Anderson, MD, PhD – Lou Jacklich Student



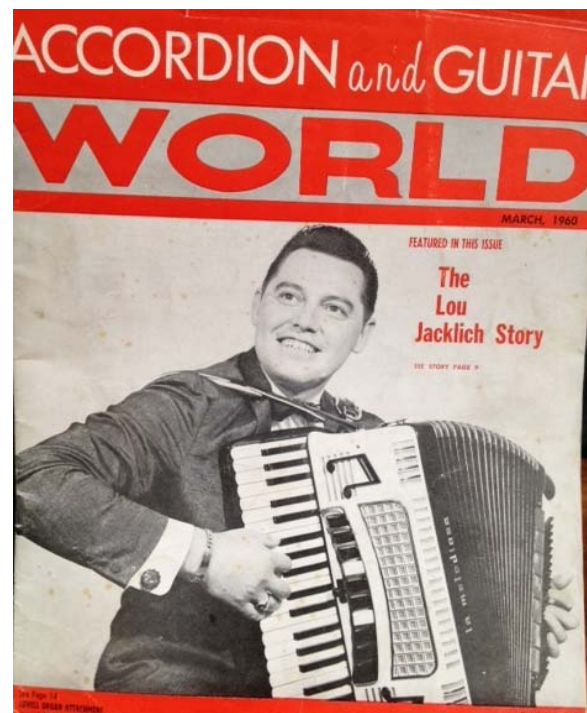
To support his family (wife and three children), Lou had 11 agents and was on the road. There were times when he had multiple engagements during the same day. He was in Los Angeles, flew to San Francisco and hired a driver to get him to Sacramento, California. His act was in such great demand that his rate was \$1,000 for 17 minutes in the 1960s! But the tide was changing and Elvis and the Beatles brought in a new wave of music and popularity of the guitar.

Lou had numerous challenges with the electronic accordion and from extensive playing he also wore out four La Melodiosa accordions. The accordion attachment came with a lot of uncertainties and apprehensions before and during the act. There was the time that the foot pedal caught fire and was smoking underfoot. The audience thought the smoke was part of his act. The airline handler ignored Lou's request to please be careful, and the handler managed to drop the accordion..."oops"...and there were pieces like a jig-saw puzzle that Lou had to repair

on the road. He had to have spare tubes on hand in case a tube blew out. Some performers were jealous of his popularity and talent. A female singer in Sacramento pulled the electric plug on him while he was playing. Being a professional accordionist (in particular an in-demand electronic pioneer) took a lot of effort and patience.

Lou eventually retired the electronic accordion from his act and now owns and performs only with his custom-made Bugari that is equipped with chin-switches. His agents booked him at some unusual gigs including a nudist camp (he refused to "do as in Rome" and claimed "I might pinch myself with the bellows."), a funeral in which the client wanted him to play "Roll Out the Barrel" (to tempo) as the coffin was being rolled out to the hearse, and a wedding reception at the renowned Fairmont Hotel in which a brawl broke out and he got to depart (paid in full), after one tune. During the summers he performed with many performers on hiatus from the Lawrence Welk Show via the circuit of 17 county fairs from Eureka to Los Angeles.

Lou's career as a professional accordionist and musical arranger spans 70 years. His original compositions include "La Promesa de Amor" a tango that was inspired during his accordion tour to Mexico.



Lou is semi-retired and continues to teach and perform. His students range from college age to retirees. He has many loyal students who currently have been with him for 15 years or more as returnees. Several current students who studied with him during the 1940's and later have resumed lessons. Some students live out of state and work with Lou via SKYPE lessons. His YouTube channel with recent performances and excerpts of lessons on his acoustic Bugari accordion is at: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKp2aceZ7\\_p3wlAUhYhz2YA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKp2aceZ7_p3wlAUhYhz2YA)

During the July 2014 Accordionists and Teachers Guild, International convention in San Francisco, Lou was recognized in honor of his lifetime dedication to the accordion profession and congratulated by San Francisco Accordion Club president, Lynn Ewing. (Photo, left)



At the September 2014 San Francisco Accordion Club, Lou Jacklich was presented with the Club's first lifetime achievement award in recognizing his distinguished teaching and performance career. (See SF Accordion Newsletter, October 2014, p. 4 [http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Oct\\_2014\\_NL\\_OL.pdf](http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Oct_2014_NL_OL.pdf) )

Lou Jacklich with some of his current students at the San Francisco Accordion Club Gala on June 6, 2015 in San Mateo, California.

Front row: Jennis L., Pamela T., Jane T., Scott A. Back row: Elaine C., Lou Jacklich, Randy H., and Steve M.

Photo courtesy of: Steve Mobia



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Reference:

1. "The Lou Jacklich Story" Cover Story. In *Accordion and Guitar World*, March 1960

Further Reading:

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[http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Jun\\_2009\\_NL\\_OL.pdf](http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Jun_2009_NL_OL.pdf)
2. "Lou Jacklich Plays (continued from the June Newsletter)." By Scott Anderson, MD, PhD. In *San Francisco Accordion Club Newsletter*, July 2009, pp. 6-7.  
[http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Jul\\_2009\\_NL\\_OL.pdf](http://www.sfaccordionclub.com/newsletter/Jul_2009_NL_OL.pdf)

Contributors: Pamela Tom; Scott Anderson, MD, Ph.D.; Elaine Cooperstein; Robert Cooperstein, DC, MA; Steve Marshall; Steve Mobia; Sue Hirigoyen; Jan Toepfer; and Jane Tripi.

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## **The Lovell Organ Attachment for Accordions**

In 1960, the Lovell Organ Attachment for the accordion could be installed on any accordion. The organ was controlled by the use of a foot pedal (similarly to the "swell" or "expression" pedal on an organ. Both treble and bass of the accordion were wired to produce full rich electronic organ tones. A *tone control unit* was mounted on the grill of the accordion to provide easy change of organ tones while playing. In addition to the conventional tone changes for the treble keyboard and chords on the bass side of the accordion, the Lovell Organ Attachment had a separate reverb control.

Since all accordions are not dimensionally the same size, the Lovell Organ attachment required custom installation in which the contact switches for the treble are mounted on an aluminum frame under the grill and contact was made with the valves of the accordion. The entire Lovell Organ attachment consisted of a tone generator with amplifier and speakers weighing less than fifty pounds and was self-contained in one unit for portability.

The Lovell Organ attachment enabled Lou Jacklich to play his instrument as a standard accordion, as an organ without the use of the bellows, or as both at the same time. In 1960, the retail price in for the attachment and complete installation was \$995.

The attachment concept originated in 1958 and went through considerable shop and field testing. The goal was to develop a unit that would produce the very rich quality tone that is found in the finest of organs, while having a portable unit so that the accordionist would not have to carry more than one unit other than the accordion.

The attachment was patented in Italy and a U.S. patent was filed.

The inventor of the attachment was Kenneth Lovell. Kenneth played the accordion for many years as a hobby while his main field was electronics. He was president of his corporation.

Source: "Lovell passes extensive tests," in *Accordion and Guitar World*, March 1960.