

Jarvis Rich: JR
Tracie Wilson: TW

JR: (??) come across a DVD of Faith Petrick giving a 90th — a 90th birthday party concert at Freight and Salvage, which is our premier Bay Area venue for folk music and it was a good show, it was a good DVD. I've also been interested in the uses of video versus audio. I think that audio was a big step but video has some drawbacks to it. Sometimes you can see a little bit more of what's going on and sometimes it just intimidates people.

TW: Hmm. That's interesting. Uh, okay, I think it's working. It seems to be good this time. The lights are on. Maybe when I moved the mic when you were talking I hit that somehow. Okay, so, yeah. I'm with Jarvis Rich, once again, at Archie Green's house on January 24th, 2007. And he's a former member of the Campus Folksong Club, and I'm asking him a few questions about that experience. So, let's see. Maybe you could start with how you met Vic Lukas, because that was a good story.

JR: Yeah, well I was at the campus activities night and all the organizations around the university had an exhibit at the student union, and I went from one to the other, and nothing was appealing to me. I thought it was really awful. And I came to the Campus Folksong Club exhibit and Dick Kanar and Vic Lukas were there and some other people who'd come and go, and they invited me— Vic Lukas invited me over to dinner at his house, and I showed up the next day and he didn't seem to remember. And he suddenly brightened up and said that if he invited me then I was welcome, and as a matter of fact they were going to have for dinner chocolate pudding. But I had to wash my own dish.

TW: That's funny. So you mentioned earlier about the role that the club played on campus as part of counterculture. Maybe you could say something about that.

JR: Well, it was very important to me. And there was a definite feeling that if anything was too popular that it was not for us. And, uh, the Kingston Trio was on the top forty with many of their songs and that's how people heard about it. And then they would hear a progression of things. They might hear less popular things, maybe Peter, Paul, and Mary and then Pete Seeger and then Woody Guthrie and they would begin to listen to very early recordings from Alan Lomax. And gradually they would go from one thing to another until they became traditional music lovers.

TW: Could you say a little bit about the impact the club had on you overall?

JR: it was a bit stepping stone in my life. I was in one workshop, totally unrelated, where they were interested in stepping stones in your life, and that was a real left turn when I found that exhibit and got drawn into the Campus Folksong Club. It became a very important part of my social life and continues to this day to influence my choice of friends and my interests.

TW: You mean the kinds of people that you tend to associate with?

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JR: Certainly. For one thing, I was what they called an “independent” as opposed to a “fraternity man,” and there was a big gulf, socially, at the university at that time. There wasn't too much you had to do with fraternity people if you were not a member. And everybody had their own interests, and that took up a lot of my time.

TW: Were fraternities really large? Was it a big part of campus life the way it is at a lot of Midwestern schools?

JR: Yeah, I think about half the people were members of fraternities at that time.

TW: Well I asked you about this already, but if you could say something about how the atmosphere of the sixties, the political climate might have impacted the club. I know you said that it was kind of a loose connection—

JR: Well, I think interest in folk music has always been kind of left wing. It's democratic— you're interested in not high culture but in culture of people who were able to communicate their music without access to powerful distribution systems. And so there tends to be an interest in real people as opposed to powerful institutions. And at that time there was a great surge in a lot of things that were youth oriented, and I graduated from the University of Illinois in 1963, and I was in Chicago in 1968 when the Democratic convention kind of heralded the coming of my generation to politics. And that all was developing the time I was in school.

TW: Maybe, you talked earlier about there was this 15 year period where you kind of had your musical interests or at least your playing of music was kind of dormant? Could you maybe say a little bit about that and rediscovering it?

JR: Well, I didn't play music. After I moved to California— I met my girlfriend at the campus bar at the University of Chicago, and after she got her masters there she wanted to come to Stanford to study. And I quit my job, and I came out and I retired. I just rode my motorcycle in the hills until I ran out of money and then I got a job at Stanford Research Institute which is an institute affiliated with Stanford. I got kicked out of Stanford shortly after that because they did too much government research, like, for the Navy.

TW: You mentioned this jug band that you're involved with?

JR: Oh, yes. Well, my friend Andy Fern wrote— had a group of people that would come to his house and then he was— he moved it to this café which was a café of kind of left wing people. They had a poetry night, they had a jazz night, and he instituted Jug band night there, which the owner never really liked. But we just came into that establishment and took it over. Long before I got with it I saw a newspaper in a poster shop in North Beach saying that some poet had died and they had a wake for him there at Café Babar, so I went to see what the place looked like, and I found that my friend had been there

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already and went there every night. And so I began to go occasionally on Saturday night and play my fiddle. And I would sit in the corner at night and play my fiddle and I began to find where everything was. Now I'm a regular member of the band.

TW: Oh, and you— and I was asking about different people that it might be worth talking to. You mentioned Roger Ebert and this song that you and he sang whenever you performed. Could you talk about that?

JR: Oh, this was a parody of the Streets of Laredo, and I would do a duet with Roger Ebert at the folk sings, and we would have 1,000 people at the folk sings. And Roger would get up with me and we would sing— we would sing this. I'm going to recite it. "As I walked out on the streets of Laredo, as I walked out on Laredo one day. As I walked out on the streets of Laredo, I spied a young cowboy and he spied me too. I see by your outfit that you are a cowboy. I see by your outfit that you are one, too. We see by our outfits that we are both cowboys. If you buy an outfit, you can be a cowboy too."

TW: That's great. Well, I think we've touched on the high points at least. Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

JR: Well, I think you've got it on your other tape recorder, but I'm remembering that we went to the University of Indiana and gave a folk concert there. And people from Indiana came to the University of Illinois, and I remember Mayne Smith had a bluegrass group, and he had a bluegrass version of "House Carpenter" that I loved at the time. I remember Neil Rosenberg came along with him.

TW: Oh, okay.

A: Mayne Smith is over in the East Bay. He lives over in the East Bay. And my friend Adam Machado is in touch with Mayne. I mentioned him yesterday. He wrote an article for the JAF on Bluegrass music, a very important article when he was a young graduate student at Indiana. He was Mayne's— Mayne and Neil were friends. They both wrote.

TW: Yeah, I'll get that.

A: When did you join the Folksong Club?

JR: Oh, Right away. When I went to the University of Illinois—

A: Were you a freshman?

JR: I was a freshman, I was away from home, I didn't know anybody.

TW: Was it your first semester?

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JR: It was my first semester, yeah. The Chess Club had an exhibit that was similar and I was a chess player, and I suddenly realized that I was a university caliber chess player. I just didn't want to take the time— spend the time with that. And the Folksong Club was a little more sociable.

TW: And this was an exhibit you saw of theirs somewhere?

JR: Well, it was called activity night or something like that at the Student Union. All the student activities would put up some kind of exhibit, have people come down there and introduce themselves to anyone who was wandering around the union that night.

TW: So Vic Lukas was older at this time then? He was a Junior or Senior?

JR: Vic Lukas was— his father was a professor, he grew up in the university high school so he was—

TW: So he's from here.

JR: He was about my age. He might have been a little ahead of me in school, but he might not have been, too.

TW: I didn't realize he was from Champaign-Urbana

JR: Yeah.

TW: I don't know. I can't think of anything else, having done this twice now. I don't know, is there anything else?

JR: Well, let's take a break and see what Archie has.