

# Texas Polka News

POLKA ★ COUNTRY ★ WESTERN SWING ★ CAJUN

**Classic  
Polka  
Alpine Village  
Band**



**Polka with  
a Bite  
The Dogensteins**

**By Theresa Parker**  
*Story on Page 4*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Bohemian Princess Diary**  
Theresa Cernoch Parker  
Subs Drive Update
- 3 Editor's Log**  
Gary E. McKee  
Record Producer Ray Doggett
- 3 From the TPN Archives**  
September 2002: Polka Passion
- 4-7 Featured Story**  
**Classic or Edgy: Alpine Village  
Band Has Your Polka**
- 8-9 Editor's Log Cont'd;  
Remembering Ray  
Doggett** By Wes Matus
- 10-11 Remembering Glen  
Campbell: Musings  
from the Road** With  
Carl Finch
- 12 POLK of A Report**
- 14-15 CD Review** Texas Heartbeat  
**Elvis in Texas**
- 16-17 Remembering Johnnie I;  
Call for Apprenticeships**
- 18-19 Janak's Church Picnics**
- 20-25 Dances, Festivals,  
Live Music**
- 26-32 Festival & Dance Notes**
- 33 Vintage Items for Sale**
- 34 Top 30 form**
- 35 Band ads**
- 36 Polka Smiles**  
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## Classic or Edgy: Alpine Village Band Has Your Polka

By Theresa Parker

As you're walking around downtown McKinney during Oktoberfest and hear the **Cat Stevens'** tune *Wild World* with a reggae polka beat, no need to double check the program. Yes, it is the **Alpine Village Band**, playing a number from the set list of its alter-ego band, **The Dogensteins**. And don't worry, you will still hear lots of great Czech and German music during their performance.

Wes Kucera, drummer and band leader of both bands, describes The Dogensteins as a group that plays more "edgy" music that combines a unique blend of reggae, cha-cha, rock, country, and bossa nova, with songs from the 1950s to the present, while adding a polka rhythm to the mix. "It has been a calculated risk," Wes said. "But so far the audiences love it and we have started to play major festivals around the state and out of state this year as well."

In addition to the McKinney fest, AVB will play at Oktoberfests in Little Elm, Fort Worth, Addison, Fredericksburg, Muenster, and will make its first appearance at Wursthfest. (See band schedule, p. 7.)

"Oktoberfest in Fredericksburg's slogan is 'Oompah at its Best.' We hire bands from around the state to perform all three days on four stages. Oompah music certainly fills the air and adds lots of excitement to our festival," stated Debbie Farquhar, Oktoberfest Manager. "In 2016 I hired the Alpine Village Band for the first time, and they certainly were a crowd pleaser. They, too, keep our dance floors packed. And got lots of great feedback while they were on stage. We're happy to have them back this year, performing several times throughout the weekend," Debbie concluded. Check out the AVB appearances at [oktoberfestinfbg.com/entertainment/schedule](http://oktoberfestinfbg.com/entertainment/schedule).

## CZECH OUT THIS MUSICAL FAMILY TREE

The Alpine Village Band has been entertaining crowds at dances and festivals for years. It was during the band's 25th anniversary in 2015, that leaders Bill and Louise Kucera (Wes' dad and mom), decided to retire from the music business. The great polka music from this family goes back even farther than AVB, starting in the old country on Louise's side.

Wes' great-grandfather, Gabriel Snapka, came over on a ship from Czechoslovakia when he was 3 years old. He grew up in West, playing trumpet and accordion. His son, Henry, played button accordion for house dances around the West/Waco area. Henry formed the **Snapka Orchestra**, which included Henry, Louise on the piano accordion, her sister, Barbara Dybala, on drums, and her brother, Michael Snapka, who sang and played guitar. Unable to read music, Henry told the *Dallas Morning News* in 1987, "I just play from the heart."

Eventually, Bill Kucera joined the band playing rhythm guitar and singing, and married Louise. Bill also comes from a long line of family musicians. Bill plays button accordion, guitar, and bass guitar thanks to lessons from his mom, Sophie Adams Kucera, and Uncle Eugene. Bill's dad, Will, also played button accordion. Three other uncles also played button box, and one mastered the fiddle. Bill's Aunt Ida Adams Marek was a button accordionist as well. They just played for their own enjoyment and never formed a band.

"As you can see, I come from a heavily polka-populated background of Czech music," Wes said. "When I was four years old my mom stuck some spoons in my hand and said, 'Play.'" When Wes was of age, Bill and Louise created another branch on the Snapka Czech band music tree with **Bill Kucera's Czechmates** in 1970.

Spoons gave way to drumsticks and Wes got his first review at the age of five from the Dallas KJZT newspaper in 1970: "Following on

the agenda was a presentation of music by the Bill Kucera Family. With Bill on the guitar, Mrs. Kucera on the accordion and the little son on the drums, several musical compositions were presented, followed by several encores. What was very entertaining was the fact that the little drummer had just recently only celebrated his fifth birthday. I note that several of our older musicians really took notes of the youngster's talents and am sure to foresee great aspects for his future."

Uncle Michael Snapka joined the Czechmates on trumpet. From there it blossomed into a six- and sometime seven-piece band throughout the 1970s and '80s. Michael then formed a band called the **Czech Harvesters**, and occasionally plays with them today (you can see the Harvesters at music festivals in Ennis). In 1990, Bill and Louise decided to combine the Czech music with a German flair and formed the Alpine Village Band.

## POLKA WITH A BITE

The idea for The Dogensteins can be traced back to the University of North Texas in Denton in the 1980s. Wes was a student there, and with current bandmate Sander Hickerson, had a rock band called **The Dogs**.

Walking across campus one day, Wes thought he heard polka being played. Not in the traditional style though. It had an edge to it. That's when he met **Carl Finch** and **Brave Combo**. "They definitely influenced the creation of our alter-ego polka band," Wes said. "We are eternally indebted to those guys."

Wes and Carl catch up with each other at festivals. In 2004, the two even collaborated when Carl invited Wes to the studio to play drums during the recording of BC's *Let's Kiss* CD. The CD went on to win the Grammy for Best Polka Album of the Year in 2004. Wes displays the Grammy on his wall in his office at the City of Garland, where he works by day as the Director of Water and Wastewater. The certificate is always a conversation starter with visitors.

"I met Wes and his family in the earliest days of Brave Combo," Carl recalled. "They were all extremely supportive and it was great to meet musicians in the established local Czech/German-style polka community who understood Brave Combo and encouraged us. Once or twice a year, at least, we get to give each other a hug and say hello, along with our good buddies and partners in polka crime, **Das Ist Lustig** and **AlpenMusikanten**.

"I always felt accepted as a



Alpine Village Band (l-r): Wes Kucera, Molly Fine, Byron Palla, Sander Hickerson, Brian Busch/  
Mark Hiebert photo



friend, as well, by Wes and his folks,” Carl continued. “I’m sure we copped a few musical things from them, too, as we maneuvered our way through this complicated polka world. And, we had Wes play some authentic grooves on our CD, *Let’s Kiss*. He was amazing! Now the Dogensteins are rockin’ the polka, which is good news for those unsuspecting listeners right around the corner. We played a show with them in 2016 and they were great. I’m totally digging their sonic madness. Wes and his bandmates know, better than anyone, how to mix styles and make the results work, musically. I look forward to seeing and hearing how the band evolves and grows. And I expect to be blown away! No pressure! Viva Los Dogensteins!”

#WhoAreTheDogensteins? They are everything, and nothing at all, according to their website. They are a polka band that plays rock, country, metal, industrial, new wave, classics, and **The Beatles**. Lots of Beatles. Except as a polka. Or maybe waltz, or a nice Texas shuffle. In short, they must be seen (and heard) to be believed. Call it a credibility problem.

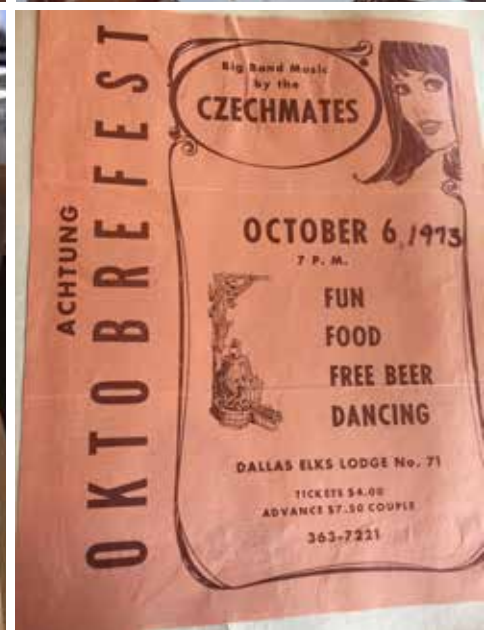
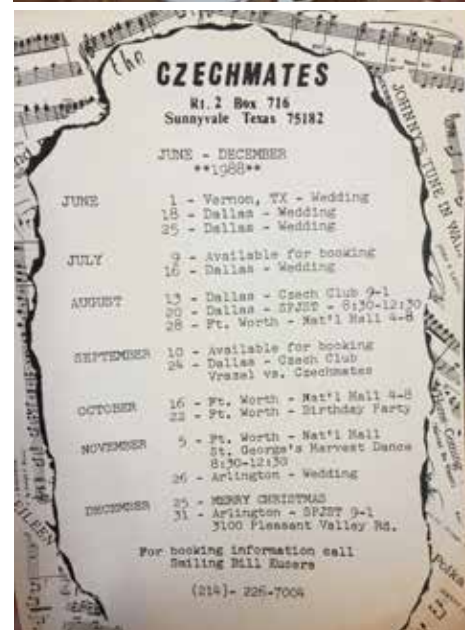
On their Facebook page, you’ll find a crazy diverse selection of videos - *Blue Bayou* (**Linda Ronstadt**), *Ring of Fire* (**Johnny**

**Cash**), *SOS* (**Abba**), and *Corn Cockle Polka* (**Jimmy Brosch**). They call themselves polka bandits. “We steal from **The Beatles**, give you polka. We steal from **The Eagles**, give you waltz. We steal from **Elvis**, give you polka. We steal from **The Police**. That’s tricky!”

“I have often wondered if (great-grandfather) Gabriel ever thought his down-the-line children would still be carrying on the tradition,” Wes said. “In a slightly different manner of course. Our goal is to get young people involved. Introduce polka in a different way through songs they know and understand.”

Band mom Louise loves that different manner. “They are awesome and definitely taking polka music to the next level by intertwining the old traditional style with their own versions of rock, reggae, swing, and other musical styles into an entertaining mix,” she said. “Who would have thought anyone could do a grunge rock version of the *Corn Cockle Polka*? The talent, energy, and infused mix of genres sets them up very well for the future by introducing a new style of polka which appeals to the younger generation audience. Bill and I love what the band is doing. I think we can sum it up by saying, ‘The

*Continued on next page*



The Dogensteins (l-r) Brian Busch, Byron Palla, Sander Hickerson, Molly Fine, West Kucera/Mark Hiebert photo



Clockwise from top left: Czechmates (l-r) Mike Snapka, Wes Kucera, Louise Kucera, and Bill Kucera; Czechmates (l-r) Bill, Mike, Wes, Jimmy Zabochnik, and Louise. Al Vanek sometimes joined the group on guitar; scrapbook memory; Alpine Village Band in 2015; scrapbook memory.



# Oompah At Its Best!



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## Classic or Edgy

*Continued from page 5*  
Dogensteins...Polka with a Bite!"

Wes appreciates the support he's gotten from his parents and his wife, Tracy. "She has put up with me, and my music, for the past 28 years," Wes said. His millennial kids, Rachel and Alex, dig what dad is doing, too. At one point, Rachel sang with the band, but both are pursuing their careers, which leaves little time for polka gigs.

### MEET THE BAND(S)

In addition to his polka gigs playing drums for the past 48 years, Wes has also played local theater shows including Broadway versions of *Annie*, *Oliver*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Always Patsy Cline*, and Sinatra's *Christmas My Way*.

Byron Palla – sax, guitar, vocalist – has played for various bands in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, as well as the Longhorn and Gator marching, jazz, and symphonic bands while attending the University of Texas and University of Florida. When not gigging with the band, Byron is a chemical engineer at Texas Instruments, but don't ever ask him about it because he'll put you to sleep talking molecules and such (Yuk). Probst!

Brian Busch plays accordion and bass guitar for all sorts of genres, including rock, Latin, polka, country, and much more drawing from his childhood in Detroit. Brian came to Dallas many years ago in a rock and wedding style band and continued to play in diversified bands for many years. He has also had the privilege of playing at the Dallas House of Blues main stage as a soloist for many of club's special shows.

Sander Hickerson started playing sax, bass, and guitar as a teen in his hometown of Belton. He studied jazz at the University of North Texas, where he graduated with a minor in music. Since then, Sander has performed, composed, toured, and recorded in a variety of musical styles, including rock, blues,



*The Dogensteins perform at Intrinsic Smokehouse & Brewery in Garland.*



acoustic jazz, polka, and hip hop. He has had songs featured on the Texas Tapes program of Dallas radio station KTXQ (Q102, and has two Austin Music Awards as a member of **diRTy WoRMz**. Now a Dallas resident, Sander also performs with rock tribute bands **INTXS**, and **The Pretenders** tribute band **In-tenders**.

Molly Fine is a vocalist (and sometimes tambourinist, when she remembers). She has been singing since she was a child, growing up in Dallas in school choirs, show choirs, and musicals, elementary school through college. In her early 30s, she was the lead singer for the rock band ironically...no, aptly named **Unknown**. These days, she's also the Chrissie Hynde lead in **The Pretenders** tribute band **In-tenders** and a back-up vocalist in the tribute band **INTXS**.

"Each member adds his or her own musical style and originality to the mix of songs that we play," Wes said. "We are all like brothers and a big sister to keep us in check. This translates into great chemistry on and off the stage. We try not to take ourselves too seriously, as we





Wes, Louise, and Bill look through Czechmate memorabilia/Mark Hiebert photo

like to have fun and imbibe an adult beverage and a beer toast every now and then. You can definitely see that in our shows."

The Dogensteins made its debut in December 2016 at the Intrinsic Smokehouse and Brewery in Garland. The group has developed a fan base at the venue and continue to perform there. Next appearance is scheduled for December after a busy Oktoberfest season.

#### ALPINE VILLAGE BAND GIGS

Fri. 9/15 Little Elm Autumnfest 7-10P  
Sat. 9/16 Addison Main Stage 6:30P, Bowl Stage, 10P

Thurs. 9/21 Ft Worth 8 & 10P  
Fri. 9/22 McKinney 5-10:30P  
Sat. 9/23 Ft Worth 11A, 1P  
Sat. 9/23 McKinney 4:30-7P  
Sat. 9/30 Lakewood Country Club, Dallas, 6:30-9:30P  
Fri. 10/6 Fredericksburg 6-8P  
Sat. 10/7 Fredericksburg 12:30-2:30P  
Sun. 10/8 Fredericksburg 4-6P  
Fri. 10/20 Cascade Country Club, Tyler, 6-9P  
Sat. 10/21 Comanche Red River Casino Oktoberfest, Duval, Oklahoma  
Sun. 10/29 Muenster Oktoberfest TBA  
Sat. 11/4 Wursthfest New Braunfels 6:10-7:20P, 9:20-10:30P  
Sun. 11/5 Wursthfest 4:30-5:30P, 7:10-8:10P

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