2012 Awards Show

“Sweet Memories” for George Staiduhar:

Top Song and Album at Polka Music Awards

EUCLID, OH – It was “Sweet Memories” for bandleader George Staiduhar as his latest recording earned best album and best new song (for the title cut, “Sweet Memories”) at the 25th annual polka music awards presented by the National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum on Saturday, November 24, 2012. The gala program was the high point of the Thanksgiving polka music weekend hosted by the Polka Hall of Fame.

Annual award winners are nominated and voted in by the national membership of the Polka Hall of Fame. The Joey Tomsick Orchestra scored as Polka Band of the Year and Brian O’Boyle as Musician of the Year. Voters chose three top Side Musicians for 2012: drummers Al Bambic (Eddie Rodick Orchestra) and Mark Habat (Fred Ziwich and the International Sound Machine) and banjo-player Frank Okicki (Bob Kravos and the Boys in the Band). Among diatonic accordion (button box) performers, Joey Tomsick won for individual player and the Fairport Jammers for button box ensemble. Dale Bucar took the Vocalist of the Year award. The SNPJ Recreation Grounds in Kirtland, Ohio, was selected for Slovenian culture and heritage, with Ohio TV hosts Ed Gabrosek and Gene Kovack for polka support and promotion.

The silver anniversary presentation was held at Euclid Auditorium in Euclid, Ohio, before an audience of more than 1,000. Three individuals were inducted into the Polka Hall of Fame for their lifetime accomplishments, as voted by members and trustees. Honorees were bandleader Steve Meisner of Whitewater, Wisconsin; bandleader Eddie Vallus of Youngstown, Ohio; and Father Frank Perkovich, of Chisholm, Minnesota, who popularized the Polka Mass.

Cecilia Dolgan, who served as President of the Polka Hall of Fame for twelve years and producer of the awards show for thirteen years, was honored for her achievements by new President Joe Valencic. Chairman Emeritus Tony Petkovsek gave special recognition to Ray Somich for serving as master of ceremonies of the awards show for 23 years.

Guest presenters included Ljudmila Novak, Vice President of the Republic of Slovenia and Minister for Slovenians Abroad; Breda Loncar, Editor of the monthly Slovenian American Times; Cindy Barber, owner of the Cleveland music venue, the Beachland Ballroom; polka music disc jockey DJ Kishka; and Philip Hrvatin and Alice Kuhar, Man and Woman of the Year of the Federation of the Slovenian National Homes.

In honor of the 25th annual Awards Show, fifteen past Polka Hall of Fame lifetime award recipients performed on stage and as members of the All-Star Band, under the direction of Tom Mroczka. Featured entertainers included Nashville accordionist and five-time Grammy nominee LynnMarie Hrovat Rink, Jake Kouwe and the Chardon Polka Band, and three-time Grammy winner Walter Ostanek, Canada’s Polka King, as well as honorees Steve Meisner and Eddie Vallus.

Several entertainers and a polka promoter were added to the Trustees Honor Roll: saxophonist Jack Frohnhofer, accordionist Lud Hrovat, promoter and videographer Ken Tomsick, and vocalist Ray Young. Brothers Eddie Vertovsnik and Charlie Vrtovsnik performed as “Zeke and Charlie” for 30 years. Tops Cardone, Buddy Griebel, Al Leslie and Carl Paradiso received group recognition as members of Frank Yankovic’s show band. Griebel, the oldest award recipient at age 92, reminisced about performing in Hollywood and Las Vegas in the 1950s.

Two Cleveland-Style polka standards were chosen All-Time Hits by voters. "Red Lips and Red Wine," an up-tempo variation on a Slovenian folk song, “Kaj pa ti, pobic,” was popularized by the Ernie Benedict Orchestra in 1949 with vivid English lyrics. The “Tick-Tock Polka,” the American version of a 1920 Italian pop tune, became a million-seller for America’s Polka King Frank Yankovic in the early 1950s.

"What a great show – the best of the music we like most,” said Don Koritnik, a polka enthusiast from Rock Springs, Wyoming. “We were here last year and we’ll be coming again next year.”

The annual Thanksgiving Weekend Polka Dance Party is presented by the Polka Hall of Fame with bands from around the country performing for three days in the Grand Ballroom and lobby of the Downtown Marriott Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio, hosted by entertainers Joey Tomsick and Denny Bucar. Eight buses arrived from neighboring states and hotel rooms were sold out for the event. Forty accordionists and musicians participated in a Friday evening jam session on stage. After the Awards Show on Saturday, music-lovers returned to the Marriott for more dancing and a Polka Mass celebrated by Father Frank Perkovich and Cleveland Bishop A. Edward Pevec.

“For our silver celebration, we presented polka fans with the best of America’s good-time music,” said Mark Habat, Chairman of the Polka Hall of Fame’s weekend festivities. “Cleveland became the Polka Music Capital of the World.”

The National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum was founded in 1987 by musicians and leaders of Slovenian and ethnic organizations to preserve and promote the city’s home-grown sound. Audio exhibits, historic photographs and original instruments interpret the story of this style of American dance music from its roots in the country’s Slovenian neighborhoods to nationwide popularity in the decade following World War II to today’s polka revival. The archive has 6,000 recordings, some dating back a century.

The Polka Hall of Fame is located at 605 East 222nd Street in Euclid, Ohio, in the historic former Euclid City Hall. The Museum and Gift Shop are free and open Tuesday through Saturday. For information, call (216) 261-FAME, toll-free (866) 66-POLKA, or check Facebook or the website, www.polkafame.com.

-- Joe Valencic, President, National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum