

A 'Tovarischi' Adventurous Performer

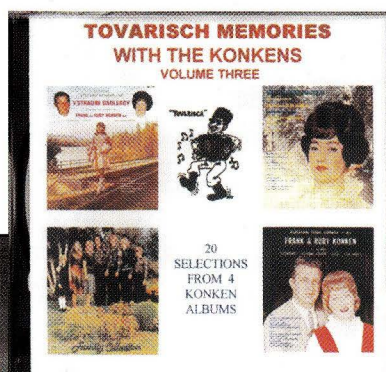
Born in the interior of British Columbia in 1927, Frank Konken has had a half century of traditional a cappella and folk singing, playing the accordion, recording records and CDs, busking, and more recently playing parts in Hollywood movies. As well as the Russian language tapes, cassettes, and CDs, he had a country music band called K-Kountry. It was a family band in which Frank and his wife Ruby (born 1937) performed for twelve years until the boys grew older and had to go their own ways. While doing Country Music, one of his country singles was on the Top Ten Chart in Ontario for about four weeks. For subsistence he worked in the construction industry, but his heart has always been that of a performer as the following article reveals (*Grand Forks Gazette*, 23 May 2001):

Frank Konken started in the musical field about the summer of 1951. At that time a group of three, one of which was Frank, met at Christina Lake one afternoon and since they had previous occasions to vocalize together they decided to drive up the road to Fife to have refreshments by the creek side and do more vocalizing.

The vocals, music, and harmony sounded great and the idea of recording was born. The group name *Tovarischi*, was chosen at the time. Subsequently, the first 78 rpm record was released. It is understood that this was a first recording within, what we may call, the Russian-speaking community... Other records followed, and with others joining the group at different intervals, they recorded some 20 rpm records in total. Eventually, circumstances prompted the group members to go their own ways.

Right, cover of 2001 CD: *Tovarisch Memories with the Konkens*, vol. Three.

Below, singers Ruby and Frank Konken, Victoria, British Columbia.



Frank Konken recently went to his local financial advisor informing him that he is a habitual 'procrastinator'. The advisor looked at him directly and said 'Just JDI'— which means 'Just do it!' Frank went home and found that the formula works. Without any hesitation, he was able to do five or six things in no time. So, when you feel you are wasting time, 'Just JDI'.

Frank continued to record with his wife, Ruby, and subsequently with his whole family. They recorded one 45 rpm record and five LP albums. In about 1983, Frank and Ruby recorded their song 'Karmanchiki' while jamming at Printers Alley in Nashville, Tenn. In 1984, they performed their song on the Don Ho Show in Hawaii.

Today, Frank and Ruby live in Victoria, BC. Frank is not doing as much music now but he has ventured out on a busy Victoria causeway as a busker, accompanying himself with a twelve-bass accordion. In the later summer of 1995, with a mandolin in hand, he serenaded folks in Montreal while travelling with a group [the 65-member Canadian Voices for Peace Choir commemorating the 100 years of the 1895 arms burning by Russian Doukhobors]. A couple of weeks later he wandered out on stage in St. Petersburg, Russia to perform with a Russian Band where among others, he did a yodeling song that brought the house down. Frank participated as an extra in the movie *Little Women*, and others including *The Duke* and *Old Hats*. He continues to participate in TV commercials, and last but not least, he yodeled at the Youth Festival of 2000.

Today he still seems to be looking to new challenges and adventures. It is understood that Frank and Ruby have now added volume three to their collection of cassettes and CDs.

A few selections from the above CD can be heard in the Audio Library in the CD-ROM *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies For Living*.

Source: Tarasoff, Koozma J. *Spirit Wrestlers: Doukhobor Pioneers' Strategies for Living*, Brooklyn, Toronto, Ottawa: Legas Publishing and Spirit Wrestlers Publishing, 2002.