

Accordionist travels bumpy road

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The immigrant's son began taking lessons. By 7, he was entered in the state accordion championships, which he would win for the first time in his age bracket at 11. The win qualified him for the national championships.

At the time, Soave said, he was playing accordion "novelty."

When he was 15, Soave won another Michigan championship, again moved on to the nationals, and this time he won his first U.S. championship.

That win — on a piano accordion — qualified him for the 1980 Coupe Mondiale in New Zealand. The immigrant's son, a spinner of novelties, had become a world-class accordionist.

Still, he was a bit overwhelmed in New Zealand, where several of the competitors were armed with chromatic accordions.

"The competition knocked me out. It was incredible. I'd been playing 10-11 years, but it was awesome — the music and the instruments. It was a great inspiration."

THAT'S WHEN SOAVE bought his first chromatic accordion.

Two more national championships and third- and fourth-place finishes in

Coupe Mondiale competitions ensued. Soave, already recognized in Europe as a leading accordionist, also had several successful concert tours across the Continent.

Finally, this year, Soave knew he was ready for the Klingenthal. But he really didn't know what he was in for. "We flew into West Germany, rented a car and drove to Klingenthal (East Germany). My visa was very limited as to when you could arrive and where you could stay."

Soave and his traveling companions arrived about a week before the competition.

"We were accepted very well by the townspeople. The regular townfolk really look up to Americans and like to follow in our footsteps as much as possible."

Competition officials were friendly, too, although not as helpful as they might have been. Soave explained:

"THE COMPETITION consisted of three rounds, the first being a test piece and an original composition (for accordion). If you weren't eliminated, you went on to round two, a 30-minute program including a piece written before 1800."

In the final round, the top four com-

petitors were to perform with the Leipzig Symphony Orchestra. Months in advance, each competitor had received the concerto he was to perform. In the event he reached the final four, Soave said.

What Soave didn't know until the day of his final performance, however, was that the judges expected performers to have memorized the concerto, Holmut Reinbothe's "Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra."

Soave had rehearsed the piece numerous times, of course, but had made no effort to memorize it. Now he had less than a day to do so.

"The Russians had a constant smile on their faces while I was rehearsing because they thought for sure I wouldn't perform the piece by memory."

"To be honest, it looked kind of doubtful for me. But I'd made it this far, worked this long. My goal was to do something that hadn't been done before, so I told myself I had to do it."

"When I won, it was one of the greatest moments of my life. I knew afterward — as soon as I finished playing — that I'd won. We all knew. The Russians knew."

FIRST PRIZE was 5,000 East German marks, or about \$1,500, which Soave subsequently discovered he couldn't take out of the country.

"That kind of money can carry a tourist in East Germany for a year with no problem," Soave said philosophically. He had no intention of spending more than a few days in East Germany.

"So I went on a shopping spree, buying things for everybody I could think of, treating people to meals. But shelling out 50 marks was hard — a top-quality steak dinner costs about 75 cents," or 2 to 3 marks.

"Now I have a bank account for 4,000 marks in Klingenthal." And although he will not compete at Klingenthal again because tradition dictates

that a new champion be anointed each year, he will return there to perform.

Soave also received citations and congratulations from Southfield Mayor Don Frances, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, the Michigan Legislature, Michigan Gov. James Blanchard, and President and Mrs. Ronald Reagan.

"I received fantastic support from the President, the Senate, the Mayor and the press, but the (U.S.) accordion people wanted to overlook it," Soave said, bitterness surfacing again.

His subsequent win in the Coupe Mondiale didn't open any doors either.

SOAVE, however, remains hopeful that he can build a future for himself and fellow accordionists in the United States, "and present the accordion" to a dubious public.

"Up until now, it's been competition. You have to devote so much of your time to those goals — mentally and physically. Now I'm going to put those goals in another direction."

"So far it's new to me. I don't know the procedure. Do I call up someone and say, 'Hi, I'm Peter Soave, I'd like to audition?'"

Soave is seeking professional representation. And he does have at least one lead: Among the congratulations he received after his win in Klingenthal, was one from Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" staff.

So don't be surprised if you tune in Johnny one night and see an accordion player on the show. And Peter Soave will bet you 4,000 marks it won't be Lawrence Welk or Frankie Yankovic.



Ballet company to give 3 shows

The Michigan Youth Ballet, under the direction of Theresa Lee Nash, will give two performances at Meadow Brook Hall, Rochester 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday and another at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 21 at Summit Place Mall, Pontiac.

For all three performances the company of about 30 dancers will perform excerpts from "The Nutcracker." Nicole Owen, 8, of Pontiac, will play the role of "Clara."

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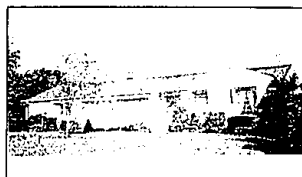
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