

Gaby Haas' *Continental Musicale*: The Longest Running Radio Program in the World

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In 1986, Guinness World Book of Records registered *Continental Musicale* as the longest running radio program in the world. The program also claimed the record for the same host and producer, same air time, same day, and same radio station for the 40 years that it was broadcast. *Continental Musicale* aired 2081 times over a forty-year period, ousting a Wellington, New Zealand radio program for the record. Gaby Haas was the host and CKUA was the radio station in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The 2006 Guinness World Records book records the Dutch radio program *Arbeidsvitaminen* (roughly translated as *Vitamins for Work*) as the holder of the present record of "longest running national radio broadcast program in the world". The difference seems slight but is significant in that the Dutch program originally ran an unhosted, purely non-stop music format, mainly for factory and shop workers, and did not have an on-air host until later in its history.

Continental Musicale was a radio program of European folk, pop and classical music from Mr. Haas' private collection, with a top-notch polka and Swiss yodelling component. The program was geared toward the influx of European immigrants after the war, many of whom became loyal listeners for four decades. *Continental Musicale* was broadcast from 15 September 1946 until 21 September 1986. In October 1987, Gaby Haas was presented with a lifetime achievement award from the Alberta Recording Industry Association. Mr. Haas died just one month later, on 22 November.

Gaby Haas was born in Czechoslovakia on 7 November 1920, and moved with his family to Canada in 1938. He brought his accordion and about forty 78rpm records of pre-war Europe's top musicians along with him. His collection eventually grew to over thirty thousand records. He spoke six languages, and began his radio career at CKUA in 1945 with a German-language program for immigrants, aptly titled *The German Show*, consisting of German music and information about Canada. This program was broadcast for twenty-one years. He was the host of other programs such as *World Showcase of Music*, *An Hour with Gaby Haas*, *Alberta Ranch House*, and *The Sourdoughs*, and he appeared regularly as a musician on CFRN-TV's *The Chuckwagon Show* and *The Noon Show*.

Mr. Haas did not limit his community involvement to broadcasting; he owned a restaurant, the Hofbrauhaus, and a record store, the European Music Shop, both in Edmonton. He was a prolific composer, writing over 100 waltzes, polkas and country tunes. He published two compilations of his old-time accordion compositions and played accordion with his band Gaby Haas and his Barndance Gang. During the heyday of the band from the 1950s to the 1970s, the Barndance Gang was one of the most sought after bands at old-time and country music events in western Canada. Gaby Haas made over 50 albums and 60 singles, mostly of polkas and waltzes that earned him the name "Canada's Mr. Polka." His albums titles included such gems as *Slap Your Maws and Clap Your Paws and Dance to the Music of Gaby Haas*. Mr. Haas no doubt would have been tickled to know that four of his albums, *Dance and Polka Favourites*, *Waltz Favourites*, *Big*

Polka Party Album, and *Hits of the Past*, have been re-released on CD by Edmonton based Royalty Records and are also available as downloads on the internet.¹

In the holdings of The Provincial Archives of Alberta are seven ¼” reel to reel audio tapes, consisting of seven hours of Gaby Haas’ radio program *Continental Musicale*. These few recordings represent only the more recent broadcasts of the program, dating from 31 March 1985 to 2 November 1986. One 50 minute ¼” reel to reel audiotape of his *European Music Shop* program from 12 September 1970, and one ¼” reel to reel audiotape of undated excerpts from his *World Showcase of Music* program are also in this collection. These broadcast recordings were donated by Richard Liukko of Freecloud Music in Edmonton, who came across them at his music store and had the foresight to donate them to the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Little did he or I know at the time that these were to be the only extant recordings of Mr. Haas’ radio programs. In reviewing some of these tapes, one of the things I learned from listening to Mr. Haas was that there was a “hiking music” genre. I’m not sure how the hikers of the time would have carried the music with them, but it was an interesting discovery nonetheless. The Provincial Archives of Alberta also has some brief but charming film footage of Gaby Haas and his Barndance Gang performing on CFRN TV’s *The Noon Show* and *The Chuckwagon Show* in the early 1960s, several of Gaby Haas’ 78rpm and LP recordings, and a handful of photographs.

From research in databases and through email and telephone inquiries with archives, radio stations and Mr. Haas’ family, it would appear that no recordings of Gaby Haas’ radio programs exist except the smattering of recordings at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. We must conclude that the vast majority of Gaby Haas’ works, especially his flagship *Continental Musicale* radio program, are lamentably lost to history. This is a particular loss since his radio programs would have provided us with valuable insight into an aspect of the social history of European immigrants to Alberta over four decades, presented through the distinctive voice and musical selection stylings of Canada’s Mr. Polka, Gaby Haas.

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Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, The Canadian Encyclopedia. Toronto: Historical Foundation of Canada, 2006.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=Homepage&Params=A1>

¹ Royalty Records, #385 22550 Twp. Road 522, Sherwood Park, AB T8C 1G8
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Gaby Haas fonds. PR2000.0931. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.

(photo)

BL1887/1 Gaby Haas (at the accordion) and his Barndance Gang performing at the Eaton's Good Deed Club Party, Edmonton, April 14, 1951. Alfred Blyth fonds, Provincial Archives of Alberta