



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Fieldworker(s): Maggie Holtzberg

Interviewee(s): Joe Derrane

Event: At request of American Folklife Center

Place of Recording: Joe Derrane's home in Randolph, MA

Recording Equipment: HHB DAT Microphone(s): Shure (recorded only on left channel)

Recorded in: mono Tape Brand and Format: DAT, 65 minutes

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Related Accession Numbers: MH-01-25

Brief summary of tape contents: The 35-year gap when Joe didn't have a button box, despite the 1970s resurgence of Irish traditional music, Joe was not connected to this community, too busy playing commercial gigs, weddings, etc, piano accordion not popular, gig at Hugo's Lighthouse, influence of DJs, 1990 Joe quits music biz, story of Joes reentry into Irish music world, Jackie Martin giving Joe a box, 1993 call from Earle Hitchner, encouraging Joe to play, Wolf Trap event, Joe woodshedding, being very nervous, working with Felix Dolan, how emotional the "comeback" performance was for all involved, Joe Wilson making Joe take a pledge to never stop playing, Wendy Newton's offer of a record deal, John McGann as accompanist, Joe's current students, local seisuns, details on Joe's custom made Bertrand Gaillard accordion.

Counter/ABS	Contents
	[some talk about reel to reel tapes]
MH:	We just finished talking about the transition into popular music. The lore that we hear about you, I mean Earle Hitchner was the one who said it was the greatest comeback in Irish story music. But there was essentially a 35-year gap.
JD:	Well there was a 35-year gap when I did not have a button box nor did I play one. Nor did I play any real traditional Irish music. You know, outside of at St. Patrick's Day, you'd be somewhere or at a wedding and somebody would say, "Do you guys know the "Irish Washerwoman?" But everybody, even all the Jewish guys knew that. That was it. So, essentially, yeah, I didn't play any Irish music for all that time.
MH:	The part that I find I don't understand is, meanwhile, the seventies, starting in the 70s with the Boys of the Lough, the Bothy Band, there was this groundswell in the Irish music world.

- JD: Exactly.
- MH: How was it that you had no contact with that community?
- JD: I really didn't. I was so busy doing this. I was doing five gigs a week, you know, on average. So it kept you pretty busy. The best I could do was maybe, I might go to the record store, I might come across the lp, like Joe Burke or something. And I'd bring that home and listen to that. But that's about it.
- MH: Were you aware that there was this thing happening?
- JD: Not really. Because it was even 1960 or so before Comhaltas got started here. And it took them a few years to get off the ground. And even though I did meet them, like Larry Reynolds and so forth and I'd bump into them at some social event, and I still remembered how to play a few jigs. But if I had to sit down and play, I really couldn't. I'd have to sit down and woodshed. And then I'm saying to myself, "But to what end? To what end?" I mean I had been left with the feeling that for me to go back to Irish music on piano accordion, at the time I said no, I've been away from this now for too long. I didn't really become aware of this groundswell. Like, for instance, I never knew until years after he left here that Paddy O'Brien was out here in this country. I didn't even know that. It was after he had gone back! that I found out that he had been here. I had become completely divorced, if you will, from that scene.
- MH: And you had moved to Randolph.
- JD: Yeah, well I came out here in 1959.
- MH: O.K., so, how did this come about, this bringing you back into that world?
- JD: Well, it's very simple. Paddy Noonan, who owns Regal Records, bought the rights to all the material on Copley that O'Byrne Dewitt owned. And one day I got a call. I had bumped into Paddy a couple of times. And I'd do an odd, for about three years, there were for St. Patrick's Day, I got together with a very dear friend of mine, Donny McCarthy. And we'd go to Cleveland to play a bash, a St. Patrick's Day thing. It was very simple, straight ahead stuff. Mary Ward was the singer, she was with us. So you just lay out some nice simple things behind her. John Joe Martin on drums and that was it. And we got together just for the hell of getting together, because these guys were out of Springfield. And I was out of Boston, but I knew Donny for years. But then he died very early on and that was kind of the only Irish work that I had done. There was no call for it. But in the meantime, in the pop field, music is coming out every day. You've got to keep up with this. So this occupies your free time. To the point where there's no time left for anything else. And this is kind of the way it went.

After a while it got to the point where piano accordion, people didn't want that either. The kids would look at me, "Eww, Lawrence Welk. Eww, this is nerdy stuff." Brides would tell you, "Well I hear you have a great band. Where are you playing?" "Well we're going to be here next Saturday night. Come down." "Well I like the band but I don't want that accordion." So ultimately, I had to just stop, and

make the shift to the synthesizer keyboards and electronic piano. With my son, we had a band and we were doing some very very fine work. Then all of a sudden, they sold the business. We were working Hugo's Lighthouse down at Cohasset, right down below the circus. We had been in there a number of times for about a year and a half. And then finally they wanted us to come in and do all the house work and all the lounge work. We were doing the lounges down there. It was very posh, a very nice thing. We liked it. But they sold the place. Never notified us until we were supposed to come in on a Friday night, the first night in February. And we got a call on Thursday night and said "Don't come in. The place has been sold." Before we even started. So we had canceled and found out a lot of other work that we had. And there were all kinds of lawsuits flying around. We didn't get involved in it because we didn't make the bookings. We were just going to play for whoever was there. They weren't going to honor the bookings. The Chart House then bought it out, but they were doing away with the lounge -- we're not going to have any functions. Brides were calling us up and "What are we going to do?" I didn't book the wedding. I felt bad for them. We did manage to work for a few of them. Some of those weddings, instead of being in Cohasset, we had to go up to New Hampshire or down to Rhode Island places because you had weddings that were starting in April and May and here this was February. And all of a sudden they're told they no longer have a venue for their weddings. It was a mess. So we accommodated as many as we can, but legally we had no problems with it.

But it kept on like that. Finally it come around 1990. I had had it. That just about crucified us down there. DJs were taking over everything. We had a five piece group. You can't compete price wise with a five-piece group and a DJ. Can't be done. Four musicians and a singer. The work got harder and harder and harder. And then finally we couldn't keep them occupied enough. Like the girl singer, this was her bread and butter. And was good for her for awhile but then she had a chance to go with other groups. And she came to us all upset and I said, "Well, no honey, you go. You have to look out for yourself. This is not a slap in the face to us, no, no, no. This is tough and I don't see anything coming down the road. So, absolutely, you should take advantage of it. If the thing builds back up and so forth, then we will give you a call and then we'll worry about it at that point. But I don't really see that happening either." We struggled with it for about a year and a half, two years. And finally I said, "Enough is enough."

So what had happened was, this was about 1990. Then I get a call from Paddy Noonan early in 1993, saying he had bought all the rights to all the old 78s. And what were my contractual obligations and what were the contractual provisions? And I said, "Well, there was no contract. Mr. Dewitt said to me, 'Joe, I want you to come in and do, you pick the tunes.' And I said all right." I talked them over with Jerry, we put a medley of reels and a medley of jigs on the other side. He was happy enough with it. And he paid you that night and you went home. It was much more than a week's pay would have been for me at that time. This is the way he did it with everybody. Very very square man, very much a straight shooter. Never had any problem with that.

Paddy said "Well, o.k., we think one of the first ones we're going to reissue is Joe Derrane: Irish Accordion." And he said we'll see that you get a box of free ones or something like that. And I said, "Gee, that's great. That's nice." What happened

then, of course all the record companies, they will send copies of any new releases to Earle. Earle Hitchener. So Earle Hitchner gets this thing. He listens to it. And he said, "My God, this guy must have been great." At least is what I understand, from what he was telling me. And he figured these things were done, you know, maybe in the '20s or the '30s or some such thing as this. And you know, "When did he die?" So he called up Paddy Noonan and he's talking about this. He said, "My God, this is really great playing." He said, "When did this guy die? Where did he live?" Paddy says, "He's not dead." He says, "I just talked to him a month ago. He's living in Randolph and this is his phone number."

So Earle calls me. Now I knew Earle Hitchner by name only. Because we've subscribed to "The Echo" for years. So I knew the name. He called me, identified himself like on a Monday or a Tuesday evening or something. And he said, "You going to be home Thursday night?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'll call you around 7:30, 8:00 o'clock." He said, "Have a cup of coffee and we'll chew the fat for half an hour. I'd like to talk to you about this. Where you've been and what have you been doing." So fair enough, I had my coffee ready and he called right on time. And we started talking.

He says, "Well, where are you playing?" I said, "Oh, I'm not playing. I haven't played since 1990. Haven't played a note." "Oh, but you still have your accordion." I said, "My piano accordion?" He said, "No, the button accordion." "Oh," I said, "I haven't had a button accordion for 35 odd years." "What do you mean you don't have a button accordion?" This type of thing. "I had to sell that to buy a piano accordion, and finally that thing died; I still have it around here someplace, but it's in need of repair now. But I mean, to what end? I'm not going to do that."

"But you're going to do this again, you're going to play Irish music?" I said, "No Earle, I don't foresee it." Now this is 1993. At this point I'm 63 years old. So Earle says, "Well certainly you're going to come back and you're going to play." I says, "Earle, I don't think I could ever play at that level again. Those things were done 1947 through '50, '51. You're talking a long time here. And I don't have an instrument, number one. And that's a big investment for me to make, not knowing what's going to happen. Number two, I don't think I could play at that level again. I haven't played for so long."

He was absolutely stunned by this. And he said, "Well alright, where have you been, what are you doing and what were you doing? Where were you playing? What kind of things were you doing, and what kind of music, and blah, blah, blah. Did you like this better than that?" This whole thing. And it was very professionally done and very nice to talk with. And I have never met this man, nor had I talked to him before this. So, he says, "You know something," he says, "everytime we come back to Irish music, and the button box," he says, "your voice changes." And I said, "My voice changes?" I said, "I don't understand." He says, "Yeah, your voice just takes on a different change. It's like it's full of life." He says, "I'm telling you, there's a fire in your belly yet." He said the fire still burning there. You don't want to play?" I said, "Well, I'd love to play Irish music again Earle but I could never play at that level. Not starting at this stage in my life."

He said to me, "Well," he says, "I think if you really want to do this, you could do this. I'm not so sure about other people." This guy got right inside my head. He got inside my head and he planted the seed. We talked for about three hours on that phone interview. Very nice thing.

Shortly after that, my buddy Jackie Martin showed up here at the door one night an old Walters, a 15-key, a mongrel. A hybrid, I shouldn't say mongrel, hybrid. Excuse me. Not full octaves at all. It was one small octave, pretty much. Like a 10-key melodion with four or five buttons of accidentals inside, rather than ten or eleven. So this was Jackie's own box. Some years before, Walters, who was a very fine box maker, had died and the sons didn't want anything to do with the business. It wasn't for them so they were going to sell off all the accordions that were there and parts and pieces. Jackie found out about it and his father gave him some money and he says, "Here. Go down to New York and see what you can get. And bring back two boxes if you can." Jackie found two boxes. One he gave to his father and the other one he kept. And he was playing this on and off for years. Well Jackie's father had died. And then the father's box had come back to Jackie. Jackie doesn't play out. Not really interested. He loves to play in his home for his own amusement.

Here he is sitting there with two boxes. And he says, "Here's my buddy Joe Derrane. I've been dying for him to get back to playing. And he has no box." And he said, "Well I don't need two of them." So he went up to some sign store, hardware store and he got these paste on letters, "J. Derrane" and pasted it on the front of the box. Showed up here and says, "Here." And I said, "Jackie I can't accept that. And I'm not in the position to buy it now. I can't accept it. That's worth a lot of money, Jack." And he said, "No, I insist. I want you to have this. Please. You have no excuse now. You got a box, you can start back playing."

So I started kind of tinkering with it. But you know, you play ten, fifteen minutes, and I said, "Ahhh, this is dumb. I can't do this again." What happened shortly after that, a few weeks after, I got a call from Mike Denny, from the Wolf Trap Festival, in Vienna, W. Virginia. "Joe, we'd like you to come down next May." I says, "What, yeah?" He says, "We'll fly you down and put you in a hotel. We'll feed you and give you a fee and all that." And I'm saying to myself, "What do I have to do for this?" He said, "Well, the reissue of your music, there's a tremendous amount of interest here. You can come down, we'll give you a nice little spot in the tent somewhere. There will be a lot of people that would like to hear where you've been, what you've done, why you did what you did, and how you're doing and what's happening? What's your life like now? Give a little talk. Or you can play." I says, "Oh hell, I'm not very good at talking, I'd much rather play." And he said, "You're on. Somebody will be in touch with you in a week."

And he hung up the phone. All was I knew was his name, Mike Denny. I didn't know where he was, or anything else. I said, "Oh my God." I was telling Ann, "What did I do?" And Ann pointed out that it must have been here." "Well yeah, it was kind of instinctive, I suppose." So sure enough, about a week later, I got a call and they said we're going to team you up with this New York piano player, Felix Dolan. Course I had heard Felix on records. "Is that alright?" I says, "Who are you kidding? I'd be delighted.?" So he says, "O.K., here's his telephone number. Give him a call, so you can kind of set up something. Probably make

tapes or something." So I called up. This is how I was introduced to the legendary Felix Dolan. The Big Fella, as I call him. He said, "Look Joe." I said, "Do you want me to write out things, all these tunes?" He says, "Oh no, no, no. Just sit down and play them. Just cheap cassette. Don't worry about mistakes or anything. Give me the meat and potatoes of the tunes. But do them the way you want to perform them. Now if you're going to do three tunes in the medley, and each tune is three times, play them the three times. Or if one is only going to be played twice and one's going to be played four times, do it that way. Pick whatever tunes you want. Please don't worry about the mistakes or anything. I'll work with them here."

And I said, "Gee, that's great." Now I gotta get into high gear. So I really set out. The first couple of days I'm at sea. How about this tune? And what about that tune. And how does this go? It finally dawned on me, "Joe, you're going about this all wrong. What you're doing here is trying to recapture all the tunes you knew from before. Can't be done. Not in that space of time. And not do them at the level that you want.

And so I went into some of the books I had, O'Neills and whatever. And I remembered this tune and that tune. They told me you'd need about enough to do maybe a 50 minute set. O.K., so I identified all those tunes. I sat down and worked on them and worked on them and worked on them for about a month, month and a half, two months. And then, I sat down and played them, loaded with mistakes and fired it off to Felix Dolan. But then I kept working those tunes but I was hitting the box six, seven, eight hours a day, seven days a week. The first three weeks were sheer agony. After that it eased up. And another three or four weeks after that, it wasn't a problem anymore. Oh but the whole arm, right in here. So I was up in the kitchen and you'd fill the sink with ice cubes and the cold water and then you'd play for half an hour. And then you'd run it under the hot water. But after about three weeks it --

MH: --came back

JD: Yeah. So that's how this whole thing came back.

MH: Was it a coincidence with Jackie showing up with an instrument?

JD: Oh yeah. That was just a coincidence. It had to do more with the time his father died. And then Jackie wanted to have his father's box all redone. He took it up to a guy, Arthur Welch up in Loudon, New Hampshire, very good accordion mechanic. That was tied up for several months up there. But because of the emotional thing, he wanted that. And then after he got that back, he started to play that and he liked it better than the one he had been playing. And then the light dawned. And it's just a coincidence. So I had the box here but I hadn't been using it. I still have that box, Jackie Martin's box upstairs. I wouldn't sell it. I couldn't. I'll never use it again either but that's neither here nor there.

That was kind of the start of the whole thing. Like my daughter used to tell my wife, "It seems like no matter what hour of the day or night I call, you hear him practicing in the background." And Ann said, "Yeah, well he's at it constantly now." So I worked and worked and worked and worked, very severe schedule.

After two months, I was able to kind of, so I stayed on it and worked on it until I was comfortable because it turned out that my wife was going to go, my daughter and son were going. They had never heard me play the button box before. They knew about it. But they had never, because I didn't have it.

Earle Hitchner was going to be there. And they had Earle be my presenter. And I met Earle at the festival. And actually we got down there - Wolf Trap was only one day, Sunday, as you probably know. So we got down there on a Saturday. And my son and my daughter and my wife and myself. Then they had a big ceili dance that night. So they say, anybody that wants to go, they lay on a bus. So Ann and I, we got on the bus. I was sitting up near the front, we were just going to go out, they had these little wrist bands so we can get in. I saw this guy get on with this big cowboy hat. And I recognized his picture. So Ann says to me, "That's Earle Hitchener." I looked at him and I says, "You're right." From his picture in the paper. So I stood up and I met him on the bus. That's how we met.

There was no rehearsal with Felix. We walked out on the stage. There he was. And we sat down and we did it and the response was just incredible. People all over the place, including me, everybody was crying. Crying. And my daughter was sobbing. I was crying. My wife was crying. Half the people, more than half of the people in that tent, we had about 1200 in that tent, they just raised the roof. It was just an incredible thing, altogether. Billy McComisky was there, "Go Joe, go!" And I didn't know at the time who he was. I knew the name Billy McComisky, but I had never seen him or met him. And I met him afterwards. And it was just a fantastic thing.

And then as I was getting off the stage, they made me, they had to bring me back to take a bow. I had to swear that, and this is hilarious now because I don't think I even told Joe Wilson this. There was this man kind of, he was there helping set up the stage and moving speakers and all -- you know, just in a pair of slacks and this kind of a summer, floral type shirt. He's moving all this stuff around. I thought he was one of the stagehands. I didn't know, nobody was telling me anything. And I was so excited, nothing was working right up here. He came back and said, "Come on, come on." And he took me and he led me and he said, "Now raise your right hand and repeat after me." And I had to swear to all those people that I would never again quit playing. And I'm saying to myself, "Boy, this is a nice guy for a stagehand." And after I come off, I was telling this to Earle Hitchener and he roared laughing. He says, "Stagehand? That's Joe Wilson." And I says, "Ewww. . . ." I really didn't know. But he was so nice. I met him a couple of times after that. He's very gracious, as always. Very nice man. I like Joe.

MH: Now wasn't all that captured on Frank's film?

JD: Frank Ferrer got a video photographer and the two of them flew down. And that was all reduced to a documentary, about a half an hour. But they must have filmed about eight hours of that day. And then Frank came out and did more here afterwards, and spliced it all together. "As Played by Joe Derrane." And this whole thing was just -- you know, they had the battery pack on me and the wireless mic and I'm, I was very uncomfortable with the whole thing. I really didn't know what to make of it or how to handle it.

MH: Were you nervous beforehand?

JD: I was scared stiff. Absolutely scared stiff. I thought I was going to faint when I got on the stage. But they were very kind and I suspect it might have Earle Hitchener's doing in that I had to do a workshop set first for about 50 minutes. Do a little interview, well where have you been, why did you stop, where did you go, what are you doing, you know, blah, blah, blah. He'd ask you a question or two questions and you'd give the answer. And then you'd play a tune. And you kind of loosened up a bit. I think that helped a lot; it took the edge off.

When I walked out on the stage, then there was this big, big huge guy, Felix Dolan. And he's one of the nicest people anywhere. I would play with that man anytime, anywhere, anyplace. And he is funny. He is one of the funniest people I have ever met. You wouldn't think it, looking at him on the stage, but when you sit down, when you talk with him and you get him going, he has a wicked sense of humor. And I've enjoyed myself anytime I've been with him. Great piano player.

MH: So did that turn you around? Did you know at that moment, like, what was it like when you saw the response?

JD: The first set I was panicked. Actually, panicky. And I said, "Oh my God," I almost froze. The thing was, here was my family. Here was Earle Hitchner, who I knew was kind of routing for me. A lot of people were expecting me. And I was told, "Well Joe, there's going to be an awful lot of people here today. They're familiar with the work you did back in the late forties into fifty. And the big question is, 'Can he still do it?'" And I'm saying, "My God, what kind of pressure are they putting on me here?" I was literally panicky.

But those six months of intense practice came to the fore. After I got through the first set, I kind of settled in. Even my wife has said it and my son has said it, "First set you were tight. But you can see it; you just settled in." And I felt it that way too. It was being, coming home again, or something. Without a doubt, other than the day I got married, maybe, or the dates that my two kids were born, it was probably the single biggest day of my life. I was on cloud nine.

And then I didn't get off the stage and I started to leave the stage, there were five or six steps up and there was this woman standing at the bottom of the steps as I started to come down. I said, "Hello." She said, "Joe, my name is Wendy Newton and I own Green Linnet Records. Would you like to record for us? We'd like to-" And I said, "Well, uh, yeah. Sure." She says, "Good. You'll first have to build a budget and all that. Somebody will get on to you. I'll call you within ten days or two weeks and we'll set something up. And we'll tell you what you have to do and how to go about doing it." She was very kind. Very nice to me. So I did two albums for then. And then I did one for Shanachie. And of course each album, it's funny, I've sat here and my son has said and my daughter -- you can hear the transition, the difference in the skill level, from album to album. You can hear it certainly between the first and the second. But after that, it's more the approach. I spent so many years in the commercial work that I don't want that to intrude on the traditional Irish, but still there are little ways of doing things and every so

often, I slip something in and it's gone and it's out. I think it fits and I like that. I'm also a rebel in the sense that I don't like to be put in a box, that you must play this and only this, only in this way and only at this time. I think that will smother. And, of course, the purists will argue with me about that. But that's alright, that's an opinion and they're entitled.

Look at Michael Coleman and "Bonny Kate." If you look at the original tune and the way he played it, he didn't just ornament, he literally innovated that -- it's a whole different tune, really. It really is. And still he's so highly regarded. So how can you say it's alright for him but it's not alright for someone else? No. That doesn't hold water. And you have to, you want to preserve the essence of it, certainly. But you have to allow musicians to put something of themselves into this.

MH: And does your playing change depending on who you're playing with?

JD: Uh, yeah, well I haven't had too much of experience with that since I've come back. Strange as that may seem, cause most of my is solo work. Although the last two albums I did now, it's different. My playing with Frankie Gavin on "Island's Harvest", the last one I did, is a little bit different than the playing I did with Frankie Gavin when he was a guest artist on "The Tie That Binds." But, no, one, there's the difference in sound, there's the difference in studios. There's a little bit more freedom here. The other one was more -- two different concepts for the albums.

MH: And what about the one you're about to do with --

JD: John McGann. Yeah, well that's pretty much a solo album. But I'm going to have John do at least two solo tracks on there because he's great. He really is. What a musician, fine musician. And it's lovely, you can just write out simple chord charts for John. Also with the caveat that John will put you into the ballpark very, very quickly. If you see something or feel something here that you don't want to use, "use something else. It's yours, you do it." So that you have no problem. But if you get into a situation where you're not going to have a chance to rehearse, you can bring those things to the gig and just give them to him. He just reads them. He's great. He's such a joy to work with.

MH: Now do you not, you don't play out at seisuns?

JD: Very rarely. Cause I'm still teaching. I teach two nights a week. Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

MH: What kind of students do you have?

JD: Let me see, I have two young girls, thirteenish, fourteen. And I have two brothers, Joe Doyle and Jack. Do you know Jack? Fiddle player. Oh he's a great friend of Larry's. He's at all the seisuns over there at the Greenbriar. But he's a fiddle player. I can't teach him anything about the fiddle. When he first asked me, I said, "Oh John, there are plenty of fiddle players and teachers." He said, "No, no, no, no, I don't want you to show me how to finger or anything like that." He's having some trouble with his tempos. And inconsistent, uneven. Then I found out that

part of it had to do with not executing everything he was seeing. If you're going to play a triplet, he's only playing two notes instead of three. That type of thing. He was dropping, in the excitement. So you have to kind of sit him down. He's come along quite nicely. Then his brother Joe is just playing box. But Joe loves sitting at home, playing. He just wants all kind of new tunes. And then I have the two girls and then Andy Healey - I had two of his sons. The bandleader, Andy Healey and the Country Roads. Then Tom Hurlahy. And that's about it for the moment. I had up to twelve at one time. Then, bit by bit, some of them peel off. Then they lose interest and somebody else comes. I've got a few there that still want to study but I don't want to go beyond the two days.

MH: There's a really nice seison at O'Leary's.

JD: In Boston. Jimmy Noonan used to do it.

MH: Jimmy did and then for awhile, Tommy Peoples was doing it. And Peter Malloy. But it's nice because it's very quiet and no smoking.

JD: Most of the seisons, like at the Greenbriar, it's wonderful. I mean, I'm thrilled to see the kind of a turnout they get. But when you're getting 60 musicians all playing together, I mean, it's -- and they're on opposite sides of the room. It's such a big thing that really, you can't make it cohesive.

MH: But at O'Leary's it's one table.

JD: Well yeah. But that's my idea of seisons. I like that. But I just haven't had the time.

MH: Well, it's a long way.

JD: Well that's it. That's the other thing about it. Some of those are on nights that I teach as well and it becomes kind of awkward.

MH: This has been great. Do you want to play at all or do you not?

JD: Oh I don't care.

MH: It would be lovely to have a little bit on the tape.

JD: [Joe goes to get his box] . . . Just a hole series of circumstances that came together. I got involved, I must say, at first reluctantly. I was scared. I was scared stiff.

MH: Do you feel like you came back up to where you were?

JD: Oh yeah, I think I've been there and then some. And one of the things that has happened is I've explored the box in a way now that I never did when I was younger. I was too busy playing, working. But I've explored it now and the potential for this thing never ceases to amaze me. What you can do with them. Well, this is my own base design. I've given this design to I don't know how many people that have asked me. They all look at it and I don't think they understand what's happening. Number one, it's a fourteen base. Twelve is about the most you

can get. The standard is eight base. Twelve is a special order, but this fourteen; I drove him crazy. But he found a way to build it.

MH: So it's two rows of seven.

JD: Yeah, but the way they work, you have a base and a chord thing and they're paired. Diatonic means that you pull, you get one tone, you push, you get another. Well the diatonic bass I have is these [tones] it's an f and a c. Everything else is the same push or pull. [tones] Cause what happens is, on the straight diatonic base, if you want to get a, let's say a d chord on a pull, then you want to get a d chord on a push, you've got to go to another set of buttons. Never made any sense. You get very limited interaction between the others. But see this allows me to play a d this way [tone] or this way [tone] . . . [he continues to demonstrate various ways of playing different notes and chords and voicings.]

I've been exploring the box in a way that - well I'll do this thing for you. This is a tune that I've written. A waltz. [He plays his new waltz.]

MH: That's beautiful.

JD: It's a very different and a much bigger sound than you normally associate. You're getting much more use out of the bass and even in straight traditional.

MH: So who else is using this?

JD: No one. It's a custom design. This is a straight standard box. And that's just a custom design that I had him do for me. And he called me three times. It's made in France. He called me three times, he says, "Nobody uses the bass system." I said, "I don't care about that. Will you make this for me?" And he said, "Oh yeah, oui, oui."

MH: Is he in Paris? Where is he based?

JD: No, he's out quite a bit I think from Paris. It's a little village called La Buis.

MH: How did you find him?

JD: Oh he's very well known in the accordion world dear.

MH: What's his name?

JD: Bertrand Gaillard. Joe Burke plays a Gaillard. John Reagon plays a Gaillard. And Jackie Daly at one time played a Gaillard. But those are kind of the older models and they were four voice models -- they're much heavier.

END of TAPE