



The BDAA Newsletter

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Conferencing in the Time of the Pandemic —
BDAA Virtual Camp 2020

IN MEMORIAM Raymond Denis Kane

September 15, 1930—July 2, 2020

by Mary Dogu, Jessica McFarland and Irene McCullough



On July 2, 2020 the BDAA lost one of its most loved and loyal members, Raymond Denis Kane. Ray attended the first BDAA convention in 1979 in Pomona, New Jersey where, early on, BDAAers were impressed with this soulful bass domra player from the Balalaika Orchestra of Detroit. After that first convention Ray was hooked on the BDAA, and never missed a convention until recently.

Over the years the BDAA got to know members of Ray's large extended family that he frequently brought to conventions. Ray had eight children, seventeen grandchildren and seventeen great grandchildren. At one point in the 1989 Tucson convention Ray could be seen across the grassy courtyard changing the diapers of his grandson Phillip. "His philosophy was always the more the merrier" says Ray's daughter, Mary Dogu who attended numerous conventions with him. Jessica McFarland, Ray's youngest child, fondly remembers being with Ray at conventions in Philadelphia (1992), Reno (1994), Wisconsin (2005), Decorah, (2007), Reno (2008), and Wisconsin (2012).

Jessica says "Dad's music has always been a part of my life, from going to Friday night practices as a little

girl in Detroit, to attending several BDAA conventions, and finally joining him in Florida and attending his practice with his mandolin group. I'm so very proud of his talent and music. Dad was at his happiest playing his beloved bass domra and being surrounded by his talented friends. What a fabulous life he lived and how dearly missed he will be!"

Ray played with the Balalaika Orchestra of Detroit for 30 years, playing several instruments in addition to the bass domra. Mary recalls "Balalaikas and domras were a constant in our house! At one time or another our dad had all of us hold the instruments just get 'the feel' for them. I look back now and think he was hoping that JUST one of us would get 'the feel' and carry on with or for him. But nope, they are wonderful memories now." But Ray did succeed in getting the kids involved in the balalaika concerts. "When I was about ten," Mary says, "my four older brothers and I were entrusted with the job of 'working' the spotlight colors during the balalaika concerts. I now realize what an important job that was!"

Ray had an incredible memory, and loved telling stories about the early days of the balalaika orchestra and Detroit's Russian Bear Restaurant where he played with the restaurant's celebrated quintet in the 1960's. Ray joked that his father, an Irishman who was the Russian Bear's chef, encouraged him to play at the restaurant to "keep him off the street." "I just don't know who will now tell those stories," says Irene McCullough, who collects the Detroit orchestra's history. "Ray knew so many of those colorful musicians, and would frequently end an anecdote with "it's a long story."

Born in Michigan on September 15, 1930, Ray Kane was a graduate of Cass Tech High School in Detroit. He served his country in the Marine Corps, and was a detective sergeant in the Detroit Police Department for 25 years, later retiring as Deputy Federal Marshall from the United States Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, Louisiana after 20 years of service.

While living in New Orleans, and later in Florida, Ray never lost touch with the music he loved. While he grew up with the nickname of "Sonnyboy," he later became known to his BDAA friends as "Rent-a-Ray." Joanne Dodd of Houston says, "For many years Russian folk orchestras throughout the country, including our Houston Balalaika Society, were very fortunate to have troubadour Rent-a-Ray drive long distances to join in annual concerts as a guest performer and beloved friend." [See Joanne's full tribute in the adjacent section.] After one concert in Atlanta, Ray was presented with a tee shirt that said "1-800-RENT-A-RAY." Ray's distinctive bass domra sound made him a much sought-after guest musician.

While in New Orleans, Ray developed a special friendship with Natasha Ramer, the artistic director of Moscow Nights Inc, a nonprofit that presented Russian cultural events. Ray Kane was the organization's first president, helping Natasha lay the groundwork for future Moscow Nights events which included several Russian Winter Festivals that featured musician friends from the BDAA. [See Natasha and Sam Ramer's tribute in the adjacent "tributes" section.]

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, Ray moved to Florida, settling in Port Charlotte where he lived close enough to regularly rehearse and perform with the Sarasota Mandolin Ensemble. In Florida Ray enjoyed sitting outside watching all the birds and various wildlife come into his yard, and most evenings played cribbage with his sons. He regretted not being able to attend the 2019 convention Austin, Texas, but continued communicating with his BDAA friends and performing with the Sarasota Mandolin Ensemble. Ray performed with the mandolin group until he suffered a mild stroke in April, and the more serious one in late June which led to his passing.

Ray was a proud member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and loved his rescue cat "Cajun Cat" who he brought with him from New Orleans to Florida. When Cajun Cat passed away, Ray adopted another rescue cat that he named "Domra."

In Ray's formal obituary, in lieu of flowers the family encouraged friends to donate to the BDAA Youth Initiative at <http://www.bdaa.com/renewalbf.htm>. BDAA friends are encouraged to do so as well. "BDAA balalaika and domra players were his best friends," Mary Dogu says. "That was always confirmed during the yearly BDAA conventions. From the practices to the after parties, he wouldn't miss the experience for the world! They truly were his second family."



Tributes to Ray Kane from Friends

JOANNE DODD, HOUSTON

The day I met Ray Kane at my first BDAA convention many years ago, I heard the boundless possibilities that the powerful, resonant voice of the bass domra could make when played by a master. Ray was that master whose musical gifts flourished as a member of the renowned Balalaika Orchestra of Detroit. For many years Russian Folk Orchestras throughout the country, including our Houston Balalaika Society, were very fortunate to have troubadour Rent-a-Ray drive long distances to join in annual concerts as a



The Bass Domra Bunch Claudia Dwass, Joanne Dodd and Ray Kane

guest performer and beloved friend. Ray Kane was my inspiration, dear and generous friend to all who knew him and will be greatly missed.

ROSITA KIRKMAN, HOUSTON

Ray Kane was a remarkable musician with a distinctive musical voice that was immediately recognizable from anywhere in a room.

A regular participant as a guest musician in the Houston Balalaika Society Annual Concerts, we considered him "family". As Joan Riley, former HBS member noted, when Ray arrived, the orchestra was complete. He particularly enjoyed the after concert parties, hosted by Joan Riley at her residence.

A devoted father, Ray would coordinate any trips to visit his children with the BDAA Conventions and HBS Concerts. We all enjoyed meeting his children in the evening. Gifted with a great sense of humor, Ray inspired and invigorated HBS members, and brought a sense of fun to any gathering.

Ray performed in several of the HBS Anniversary Concerts, including the 20th, 25th and 35th Anniversary Concert, which was dedicated to the memory of HBS Artistic Director, Paul Phillips.

NATASHA RAMER, NEW ORLEANS

At the end of 1987 I was searching for musicians who would be able to play Russian songs. Someone told me that there was a man in New Orleans who played the balalaika. There was even a short article about Ray in the newspaper here. So we got to know one another and quickly became friends. Our friendship lasted for

33 years. Ray told me a lot about the balalaika and domra musicians in the United States. So in 1994 I accepted his proposal and flew to Atlanta to attend a big balalaika concert. I'll never forget: when I came into the vestibule of the Renaissance Hotel and heard the familiar sound of Russian songs being played by American musicians. For me this was amazing, really terrific!

At that time I didn't know that in five years I would organize my first Russian Winter Festival and that the musicians I heard in Atlanta would come to New Orleans for the festival. Over the course of several years they would take part in several Russian festivals. I had organized my own non-profit organization Moscow Nights and Ray Kane was the first president of our organization. We worked together until the Katrina hurricane forced him to move to Florida. But from time to time he returned to New Orleans. He was always full of energy, merry, well-wishing and generous. He was a real friend, someone I will never forget. His support and encouragement were indispensable to me as I worked to develop Moscow Nights.

In our last conversation, which took place after his first stroke, he told me: "I came out onto the veranda in the morning. It was such warm and beautiful weather. I saw some small ducklings that were playing in the yard, but suddenly I couldn't remember anything. I woke up in the hospital. But I will be fine, Natasha, I will be fine. I hope that I'll see you in September. I'd like to come to New Orleans then."

I know that he suffered a second stroke soon afterward. I want to believe that he woke up in another world among good people, his music, and the ducklings that he saw. I miss him, and always will.

SAM RAMER, NEW ORLEANS

Ray Kane was a remarkable person. His very biography suggests just how unusual he was. He came from a family of Irish descent and spent much of his career as a Detroit policeman working homicide cases. He grew up around friends of Slavic origin and became fascinated with Russian balalaika music. Moved by this music, he learned to play the domra. Through much of his working life and after his retirement he was an active participant in BDAA, attending its conventions and playing balalaika music with gusto. In combining his Irish origin with his career as a Detroit policeman and his devotion to balalaika music, Ray was literally the embodiment of diversity in the United States.

I remember Ray most for his interest in others and his sense of humor. He didn't talk about his police career unless asked, and in answering he marveled at just how little most of us knew about the nature of police work and the various dilemmas that policemen face every day. His love of music and the joy he derived from playing together with others was visible and infectious. In recent years Ray retired to Florida, but he called regularly and stopped by to see us whenever he could. He brightened our lives whenever he did.

ANN PAIGE, SARASOTA MANDOLIN ORCHESTRA

Ray was such a treasure to us all. He always had a smile and a twinkle in his eye. It was so uplifting to be in his presence. When he joined the mandolin orchestra I wrote a song about him entitled 'What a Difference Our Ray Makes' sung to the tune of 'What A Difference A Day Makes.' The song extolls the beauty and depth his playing added to every performance. Even when he was ill he showed up for most rehearsals and had a story to tell.

He will always be in our thoughts and those thoughts will tug at our heart strings.

