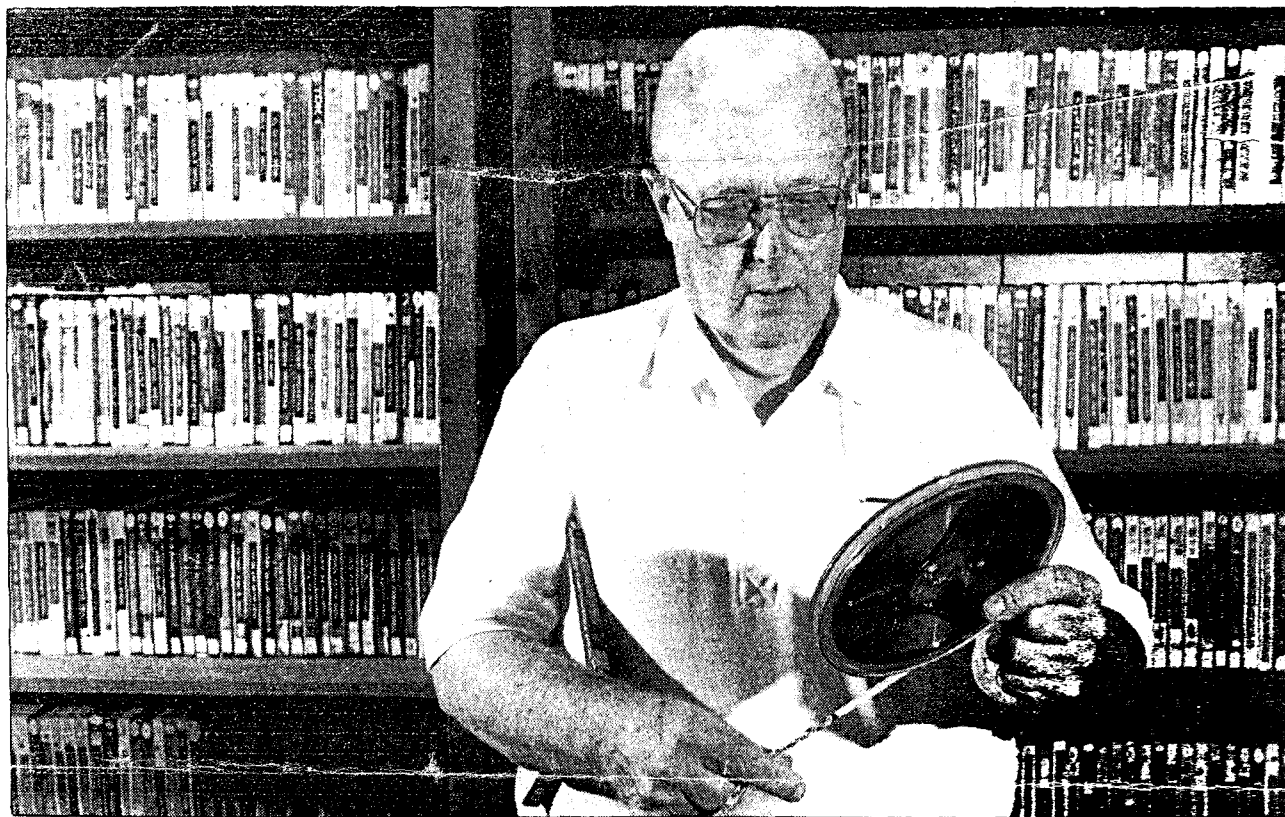


MUSIC



'Reel-to-reel' Rolly Walker started collecting music in the '30s.

Don P. Jorck/The Week

# This music man has a hobby of notes

By Cindy Walker  
Contributor

"Rolly, where have you been all day?" I've tried to reach my 76-year-old father-in-law several times since this morning.

"Oh, I've been out tracking down my recorders in Janesville," Rolly Walker explains. "And boy, what a trip that was in this heat!"

I can well imagine his discomfort—since Rolly's a portly man—but his slightly loping gait from a knee injury during World War II doesn't slow him down for a minute.

Rolly's humorous anecdotes and charming manner are captivating, and his love of music is sure to pique your curiosity.

The two open-reel tape recorders Rolly uses to play and record his favorite music—the big-band-era orchestras—have been in the repair shop for the past two weeks. Each day these recorders were out of commission, Rolly's depression increased.

"I figure, if I don't have any contribution to make, what's the use of going on?" he confided recently.

Now, to my great relief, the recorders are back and operational. Rolly's jovial humor is back, too, and I can hear the excitement crackle over the phone.

"I've got a batch of new music to work on," Rolly energetically tells me, "so I've got to get these blamed things hooked up! And, by golly, I know I took this setup apart, but I'm having the hardest time getting it back together just right."

Rolly has received requests for copies of his music and has received new music from all over the country.



Cindy Walker

*Rolly's collection totals more than 8,800 hours of listening pleasure that would take over a year-and-a-half to listen to.*

"Do you need help?" I offer, not knowing anything about the functionings of an open-reel tape system (it's a little before my time, I'm afraid).

"Oh, gosh, no," Rolly replies, a note of challenge in his voice. "I'll get it figured out. The trick is to connect the two open reels with the equalizer in between to smooth out all the rough edges. That way you feel like you're right there, listening to the music in person."

Rolly's set-up includes two reel-to-reel tape recorders, a turntable, an equalizer, mixer, pre-amps, speakers and more than 2,000 reel-to-reel tapes consisting of over 1,000 different big-band-era orchestras.

Building his musical collection since its popularity in the early '30s, Rolly's list of big band orchestras includes such well-known artists as Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Glen Gray, Lawrence Welk, Andre Kostelatz, 101 Strings and the Boston Pops, as well as many lesser-known orchestras such as Kenny Baxter, Joe Harnell, Pierre LaBlanc and Al Goodman.

Whenever we get together, Rolly has plenty to say and it's quite an education for someone like me, who's never had a decent exposure to these precious recordings of the past.

He seems to know tidbits about each and every band represented in his collection. And that is no small thing—today Rolly's collection totals more than 8,800 hours of listening pleasure that would take over a year-and-a-half (24 hours a day) to listen to.

The next thing Rolly would like to do is transfer his entire collection to laser disc.

Roland Burns Walker, "Rolly" to all who know him now, was born in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1915. Rolly's family moved frequently throughout the Midwest since his father was employed by the railroad and highway departments. Rolly joined the armed forces in 1941 and eventually went overseas as part of an armored tank division.


Upon his return to civilian life, Rolly was involved in automobile transporting based out of Chicago. The most hair-raising experience of Rolly's life occurred at this time, when his brakes gave out while driving a load of cars down Lookout Mountain just east of Chattanooga, Tenn., to pass through Jasper.

"As I went through town, I tried to figure out where I could stop, if I had to, in order to preserve many lives and do as little damage as possible," Rolly recalls. "But I managed to get all the green lights and there wasn't much traffic. The state and local police were trailing me, but they couldn't keep up."

"By the time I got the truck stopped, I was pretty shook up, so I got out and blocked off all the tires

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**MUSIC**

# Orchestra leaders leave legacy of sound, stories

Cindy Walker  
Contributor

Anson Weeks was known as 'Dancin' with Anson.'"

Rolly Walker's deep, resonant voice sounds just like a smooth radio announcer from that time as he discusses the band leaders he loves.

Anson played mostly in Chicago, Rolly explains, but one day his agent came to him with a one-night proposal from Iowa.

Even though Anson told his agent to quote a high price, it was accepted and a bus was chartered for the trip. Unfortunately, the bus was involved in an accident on the way out. Anson was dragged under the bus, crippling him so he could never perform again.

Freddie Martin used to play bass clarinet and saxophone at the same time, and he had a double orchestra which he led simultaneously," Rolly says. Freddie had his own places where his band performed regularly at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and the Miami Hilton.

Gordon Jenkins had the smoothest band I ever heard," said Rolly. "All he had were six french horns, his whole brass section, and he could get the smoothest music out of them! He led the accompanying orchestra for Frank Sinatra for a while, and Frank would come out with the smoothest songs from Gordon's band. Judy Garland would be scared

to death to perform and Gordon would talk to her until she calmed down.

"Artie Shaw would get the itch to write something, and he'd gather his band together and ask, 'Is there anybody who wants to buy this band?' Rolly continued. "When there were no takers, he'd abruptly leave! After writing songs for a period of time, he'd return and start up another band.

"Jan Garber had a big band. I don't know why Jan didn't become more popular than he did. He had two pianos, and on some occasions he'd have six playing at once. The last I heard he went to Las Vegas.

"Benny Goodman had several orchestra leaders in his orchestra, such as Gene Krupa and Lionel Hampton. Benny Goodman played clarinet and his band performed the faster types of music.

"Lawrence Welk himself is kind of unusual. In 1926,

my uncle took me up to Yankton, S.D., to a Gurney Seed and Nursery House where I heard Lawrence Welk for the first time. The next time I saw Lawrence Welk was in Chicago at the Trianon Ballroom. And I guess he was worth seeing," said Rolly.

"Guy Lombardo is one of my favorites," Rolly continued. "He started with a Canadian orchestra that had six family members in it. It was an old-time type of band with tubas. He had a style all his own, and, of course, he played at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, where 'Auld Lang Syne' was his theme song."

*Cindy Walker is a computer operator who lives in Lake Geneva. She has a husband and two kids. She also delivers newspapers—including this one.*

## Rolly keeps big band orchestra alive and swinging

USIC/Continued from Page 18

at truck wasn't going any farther! I had just sat down to calm myself when the patrolman who had been following me drove up," he said.

"Slowly he walked over to me. We must have sat there a good two hours in complete silence. When I rived home about 12 hours later, I discovered that my dark brown hair had turned completely white. That patrolman must have sat there in total wonder; my hair turned white right in front of his eyes.

"Years later I was diagnosed with pernicious anemia. At the same time, the doctors speculated that the reason my hair had turned white was the extreme fright and shock to my system when my car's brakes failed and I caremored through Jasper," Rolly said.

Finally, settling down in Chicago, Rolly worked for Argill Corp. at the Board of Trade. It was during his time that Rolly's son, Matthew, convinced him to move to the Geneva Lakes area. It was quite an undertaking, since by this time Rolly's collection involved over 5,000 open-reel tapes.

Since then, Rolly has condensed his collection, eliminating duplications and grouping all the selections on a single band together.

When asked what his fondest desire is for his collection of big-band-era music, Rolly immediately replies, "If it would entertain anybody, I'd be happy to set up a program and play it for them."

Any such program would have to run for quite a few years to encompass all of the beautiful melodies included in this fine collection of orchestras from the big-band era.

Anyone who might be interested can reach Rolly during the day at 728-5748.

You'll find him there most of the time, enjoying his favorite musical pastime—the golden oldies of the big-band era.

Of course, if he's not at home, Rolly is busy transporting his friends at senior housing to and from the airport or doctor's appointments.

Rolly also enjoys watching his grandchildren play baseball and he likes to take his favorite daughter-in-law out to lunch, where the topic of conversation usually begins and ends with his love of the big-band-era music.



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