

New Music for the Gazebo
History and Practice Suggestions
by Toby Hanson

Many years ago Rick Hatley had a profound inspirational experience. He had visited the Norsk Høstfest in Minot, North Dakota and participated in their massed accordion band. Inspired by that occurrence, he was determined to create something similar for the Leavenworth International Accordion Celebration. He brought the music back with him from the Høstfest and started the original LIAC Gazebo Ensemble.

Sadly, Rick passed away a few years ago from cancer and the management of the ensemble fell to Jim O'Brien, a retired music professor from the University of Arizona. Jim brought his own musicality and experience and updated the book with many of his own songs. After many years of leading the band he turned the job over to Lyle Schaefer and me last year. Both Lyle and I were incredibly impressed by the quality of the players and the overall ensemble last year.

At the end of last year's festival, Lyle and I started soliciting suggestions from the various performers and attendees about how the Gazebo Ensemble could be improved. Based on those suggestions we put together the new Ensemble Book for 2020. One of the most common suggestions was that members wanted complete accordion arrangements rather than just melody lines with chords so that people wouldn't be playing clashing left-hand parts. Another common suggestion was for a different variety of music. The previous version of the book had a lot of light classical music and many people suggested more dance music. We did our best to accommodate as many suggestions as possible and produce a new book with professional yet approachable arrangements.

As players start to familiarize themselves with the music, they will notice changes. There are songs in new keys. This is to accommodate players of diatonic accordions. We tried to include a few songs in flat keys and sharp keys to make it easier for those players. We also included some new versions of songs that were previously in the book. This means learning a song you probably already knew but in a new way and in a new key. That may be a challenge but it's one that will build your musicianship.

For some players this new music will present a challenge. We recognize that and would offer the following suggestions for those players: **1. Just play the right hand.** There will be enough players playing the left hand that it won't be a problem if a few people lay out. **2. Play just the top line of the right hand.** There are some arrangements that use some chords but you don't have to play all the notes in the chord. Just playing the melody is fine and that will make it stand out in the ensemble. **3. Play just the left hand of each arrangement.** This will give you good practice for working on your left hand and also help to balance the ensemble for those who

choose not to play the left hand.

The changes in the music represent the most significant change to the Gazebo Ensemble since its founding. While we know this may be challenging for some, we also know that this is a new opportunity for everyone to improve their musical skills and we hope that everyone will take advantage of it.