

# Windber's Zupe releases Polka album

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It has been said polka music is music that makes you smile.

Local composer and entertainer, Zupe totally agrees. The former Central City area musical artist, who now makes his home in Windber, is well known for his ballroom dance shows which include "multiple music genres."



Photo by Gary M. Baranec

Add that to his childhood memories of Sunday morning polka music playing on the family's radio and one has a platform for success in creating an album filled with new polka songs.

Zupe's love of music goes back to when he was 8 and enrolled in Shade's elementary school music program to learn the basics of trumpet playing and singing in various school concerts. He grew up with his dad playing the accordion while he played the trumpet. A fond memory he has is of him and his father playing a polka for his grandfather.

He went on to enroll in the Air Force in 1984, thanks to the guidance of his grandfather who was a veteran. He played music while in the service including winning a national talent competition where he earned the National Champion title in the "Self-Accompanied Vocalist" category.

In his official biography Zupe says he became "an apprentice of Juilliard Master composer/pianist Paul Amrod in Kaiserslautern." Under Paul's guidance he honed his compositional skills and applied them to the technologies of the time. It was during this time he started to experiment and make music with the use of computers. In 1988, Zupe was honorably discharged as a decorated sergeant from the Air Force.

His love for the high stepping polka music never left Zupe. While doing his ballroom dance shows and writing music for television, Zupe made a guest appearance with accordion master Alex Meixner and his band. He was inspired by Meixner's music and his own childhood memories hence the new polka album *Na zdrowie! (Nostrovial!)* was created.

The 15-track album by Zupe and the Polka Commandos is to be released on Aug. 21. It features an array modern polka music to appeal to all ages. With the CD, Zupe includes an insert that included all the words to

the polkas, along with a little insight on why they were written. He says he is proud of being the second generation, third on his dad's side, born in this country, to Eastern European immigrants.

"I thought it would be fun to write new polka music with modern writing and production, true storytelling akin to Nashville writers and still honor my heritage," he said.

A partnership was born between Mike Popovich of Johnstown and Zupe to write the music that will surely have the listener smiling.

"Mike and I started working together two years ago the last week in July 2018," he said.

When they first met to work on the album Zupe had already written the *Nostrovial Polka*.

"We started the process of getting together, usually three to four hours each week to develop the songs from the ideas we had," Zupe said. "We would sit down, come up with a lyrical idea and put it to a melody. I would record that with me playing the piano and singing and that was it. Once we had what we felt was a solid song idea with just the piano and voice, we would move on to a new song. This process went from July 2018 to January 2019."

From January 2019 until June 2019, Zupe developed the songs and arranged the music.

"I came up with all the instrumentation as to who is playing what, how, where. The general production and arrangement starting in those months last year," he said.

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- ZUPE

From June to November of 2019 when the recording process started, "I flew to Florida to record Alex Meixner and Tommy Halla. Brought those tracks back to my studio and flew to New York to record my bass player Christian Fabian. Principal recording was complete in November of the year. After the holidays I just sort of started mixing and putting it all together. I had all the voice tracks and music ready to go and all I had to do was mix them and now here we are within two years."

A few of the songs on the new album are funny, like "Pitiful Pierogi" about a young married woman who just couldn't make a decent pierogi, to the meaningful, "Love and Family Polka" about life in general. One of his favorites, if you could pick a favorite, is "Punxsutawney Phil Polka," that came to Mike Popovich when he was cutting his grass.

"Mike said he could not believe that Punxsutawney Phil did not have his own polka," he said.

Zupe said there are several other musicians playing on the album, which will be released on Aug. 21 on all major on-line platforms, such as iTunes, Amazon Music and Google Music. He will have actual CDs for purchase at his shows, which because of the virus, are few and far in between. Actual CDs can be purchased on his website, [www.zupe.net](http://www.zupe.net).

Presale will be on Aug. 7 which will give you a download of *Nostrovial Polka*.

On his album insert, Zupe says, "It was the inspiration for this album and a respectful nod to my immigrant ancestors, who brought this music with them, who would sing it and play it loudly after working in the mines or the mills. I hope that comes through. And, although the writing and production style may be a little different, the sentiment is still genuine."

Zupe summed up by saying "I feel that my mission is to make people feel good with music, especially during these trying times."