

2022 : The closing of a chapter : An obituary 'a deux'...

In April 2022 record collector and dealer Michael E. Gunrem ('Micky') died.

His 'copain' Dieter Schulze ('Didi') had already died in 2015.

What follows is a series of flashbacks.

Just some personal experiences and reminiscences.

For many years the address *75, rue de Meaux, La Ferté-Milon, France* was well-known to many collectors and researchers of 78rpm records.

La Ferté-Milon is a small village in the Aisne department, north-east of Paris. That is where Michael ('Micky') E. Gunrem and his partner Dieter ('Didi') Schulze were living.

Their original profession was 'cook'. Michael and Dieter came to France from Hamburg, where they ran a South American restaurant. For some time they were employed as cooks in Disneyland, France.

I have no idea when they made the switch from *cook* to *full-time record collectors/dealers*, but at some time they relocated to a village in France: La Ferté-Milon.

Roughly speaking, the roles were divided as follows: Dieter for the cooking and driving to fleamarkets. Michael for the 78s.

Didi was the friendly, gentle one of the two. He also was the one with a driver's licence. Not an unimportant asset, if fleamarkets in the region are your core business. And full of humour.

Micky was the tough one, at least, that was how he often used to manifest himself. Sometimes to the point of being downright unpleasant and moody. 'Rough around the edges' is definitely an understatement. No doubt Micky had humour too, but it often was, as if he showed that side of his character rather reluctantly, grudgingly. As if it first had to go past a series of dangerous cliffs.

I did not know Michael well enough to understand what went on underneath that gruff behaviour of his. My best guess: a very harsh, unhappy childhood.

But more importantly, Michael and Dieter definitely played an important role in the development of discography in all its many aspects.

I believe I visited them for the first time in 1993.

At 75, rue de Meaux there definitely was an atmosphere of much freedom. Their lifestyle certainly could not be called *ordinary, run-of-the-mill*. Granted, they were not overly fussy about social niceties, but they were good hosts. In the words of Rainer Lotz: *Didi and Micky had hearts as big as a whale's*.

At the time I was busy documenting the activities of the Favorite record company, and was helped out regularly by Michael, Axel Weggen and Christian Zwarg.

I was allowed access to all the Favorite records and related labels in their collection, and photographed countless labels.

In the years that followed La Ferté-Milon often was part of our holidays in France. Not necessarily always 78rpm-related. Just a pleasant first stop on the way to somewhere else. We often stayed at the Hotel de la Gare, right opposite the small train station.

Looking back, the house at rue de Meaux had something of a intriguing three-story cave dwelling at the foot of a steep precipice. At the back of the house, halfway up the slope, a path led to the meadows above. 'Die Wiese' as the boys used to call it.

At some time they opened a bric-à-brac shop in Paris called 'Shimmy' which Paula and I visited in the summer of 1996.

It was there that Michael gave me a – no doubt rare - 30cm Turkish Pathé (53327), recorded in 1912 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Over the years the boys received many illustrious guests from all the corners of the world. Mainly record collectors and discographers. They loved throwing parties (which, of course, was good for business too!). I remember the solar eclipse of 11 August 1999. On that occasion, a party was organized in the meadow above. Everyone came armed with dark glasses and the like, waiting for the '*moment suprême*' to arrive.

In my mind's eye I still see Dieter jumping around, fully in charge of the barbecue, with naked torso and in shorts. Once they visited Utrecht, bringing along *'confit de canard'*. Didi gave precise cooking instructions. To this day Paula remembers Dieter's tip to revitalize limp lettuce: submerge in water, add a little vinegar and leave it for a while...

And then there was the tombola or lottery. Every guest had been asked beforehand to bring along some unusual object and in return would receive whatever funny object had been handed in by others. My contribution was an antique metal artificial hand with wooden articulated fingers for which I had no use. Looked pretty weird.

What about their domestic pets?

Once there was Wagner, the dog.

Later Micky and Dieter adopted a goat ('Ziege'), which was christened 'Félia'. As Steve Shapiro explained, she was named after opera singer Félia Litvinne.





Dieter Schulze holding newborn goat Félia



Michael Gunrem with an older Félia in his arms

In 2013 friends received the following message: *Wir haben geheiratet! Just married! Nous nous sommes mariés!* (8 July 2013).



Micky & Didi: the happy couple!

In October 2015 Dieter died at age 59. He was buried on the meadow above the house, in the presence of a number of close friends.

At some point in time Michael had become very fond of licorice. So in the summer of 2017 we brought Michael some packets with different kinds of Dutch licorice ('Lakritzen'). Judging from the following e-mail, that was much appreciated...

In December Michael wrote:

Hallo Hugo & Paula,

Es ist bald Weihnachten und ich habe schon keine Lakritzen mehr! Am besten haben mir geschmeckt (siehe Scan), die waren sehr lecker und schön weich, die 'grote zoute drops stukken' sind zu GROSS und zu HART, die waren nicht sehr schön! Wenn ich noch etwas haben könnte von den Jubes und den Zoute drop mix, dann würde ich mich freuen! Ich wünsche euch beiden ein frohes Weihnachtsfest und einen guten Rutsch ins neue Jahr 2018, mit ganz viel Platten für Hugo und Du Paula, womit kann man Dir eine Freude machen?

Bis bald liebe Grüße von Michael

So some packets with the required licorice were sent to the rue de Meaux:

Mein lieber Sohn,

Die gewünschte Lakritzen sind unterwegs.

Keine Ahnung wann die bei dir ankommen.

Habe Geduld! Frankreich sei mal ruhig!

Dein liebster Vater (und Mutti Paula)

A few days later Michael sent this e-mail:

Lieber Papa Hugo und Mama Paula,

heute kam noch einmal der Weihnachtsmann und hat mir schöne

Lakritzen gebracht, genau die Richtigen, viel, vielen Dank an euch!

euer Sohn

Michael

The last time we saw Michael was before corona. Together we visited a number of fleamarkets, alas for Micky, without scoring any sensational 78s. Afterwards we went eating in the garden of the castle above.

In April 2022 we received the news that Michael had died. He was cremated on 15 April 2022. My birthday, as it happens...

I do not pretend to have written an exhaustive, completely true-to-life profile of the deceased and his partner.

I never was much involved with the *professional* record collecting scene.

My activities were mainly limited to either giving away, swapping, or – very rarely - selling records. That kept me away from the more unsavoury aspects of the business and thus allowed me to look at things from a different perspective. That may explain why this obituary looks a bit like a eulogy. I am aware that my account may not (completely) reflect other people's views. So be it.

I thank Didi and Micky for their friendship and hospitality...

*I thank Rainer Lotz, Steve Shapiro and Axel Weggen for their comments.
Pictures were provided by Axel Weggen and Steve Shapiro*

Michael was born on 12 February 1954, Hamburg
(source: Thomas Kristens)