

# *Folk Dancer*

**The Magazine of World Dance and Culture**



*Susie & Steve Kotansky, Merita Halili at Albanian party (see p. 21). Photo: Marc Baillargeon.*

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# Will You Rejoin the Dance?

By Karen Bennett

As can be seen from the masthead opposite, I'm the new Editor of the *Folk Dancer* – or rather, an old Editor (1994–97) returned, to replace Kevin Budd, who took over when I relinquished the helm. The fifth installment of Stefania Szlek Miller's series, which will discuss the years 1998–2011, will cover Kevin's tenure. The article begins, "Kevin Budd's intention in the fall of 1997 was to edit three issues of the magazine until a new editor could be found. Little did he know that he would grace us with his wit for more than thirteen years...." Since the third installment of Stef's series concludes in this issue, and the fourth will probably extend over the next two issues, I calculate that said fifth installment will debut in February 2013.

Readers will also note from the masthead that Dorothy Archer – who, along with me, has been a guest editor of the newsletter while Kevin Budd was on sabbatical – has agreed to be Assistant Editor. Mainly what this will mean is that Dorothy will guest-edit two issues a year (October and December) to give me a bit of a breather. (What being Editor means for me is that I think about the newsletter *all the time*.)

A new *Folk Dancer* feature is the "From Your

California Correspondent" column, written by Nancy Nies. In addition to being a dancer, Nancy has considerable writing talent. I'm very pleased to have recruited her. In this issue, she relates an anecdote about a trip to Denmark that, if the "layout gods" had been kinder, we'd intended to position next to the Finnish and Scandinavian café article. However, the "accompaniment" aspect turned out to be less than obvious. Speaking of the café, at that March 31st event I first found out about a Norwegian dance workshop in Toronto that was scheduled for the same weekend in April as I was scheduled to attend an Albanian workshop in Lachine. I love Norwegian music, and one of my all-time favourite dances, taught by Ingvar Sodal at Ottawa Folk Dance Camp in July 1978, is Vossarull (which is, of course, Norwegian). Darn it all. But off I went to Lachine, and somehow managed to have a wonderful time despite the dearth of Norse culture on exhibit. (And I met some of the same dancers I'd first become acquainted with at Ottawa camp! Yay!) I wrote about the Albanian workshop on p. 21. It was excellently organized by, among others, Yves Moreau and France Bourque-Moreau, who are pictured on the next page in a photo taken on April 21 by Marc Baillargeon. (Marc had asked permission to

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The OFDA has established an e-mail list in order to communicate timely information of interest to folk dancers. If you would like to add your name to the list, send an e-mail request to: [ontariofolkdancers@gmail.com](mailto:ontariofolkdancers@gmail.com)



***Please do let us know about special events!***

photograph me earlier that day as I was wearing an Albanian-themed shirt, but I declined. What the world missed was a black T-shirt displaying a red double-headed eagle, wings outspread: the Albanian flag, colours reversed.)

Another new feature, to begin in the October issue, will be a “Brief Workshop and Camp Reviews” section, each part of which will be a maximum of 300 words and two photos; I **strongly encourage** contributors who are writing about annually-recurring non-OFDA events to aim for this 300-word length; unique events can be longer (try 600–700 words). In this manner, I hope to increase event coverage in “short hits.”

Also new, but online: We’ll be archiving selected articles, including Stefania’s and Murray’s (look for a link called, funnily enough, “Articles”), as well as an index of *Folk Dancer* contents that I compiled covering 1969 to 1999 to aid me during my first tenure and, now that I’m again Editor, I’ll update from 1999 to the present. Among the archived articles will be a list of executive members during OFDA’s history, in addition to material that we could not publish in hard

copy due to lack of space but still deserve an audience and timely publication. One such, coming soon to the OFDA site near you, is a contribution by Fred Slater. One of Fred’s hobbies is ping-pong, and he’s really good at it. In April, he wrote a two-page article, “A Surreal Ping-Pong Adventure,” about a tournament he’d recently played in Toronto. As well, we’ll post a review of the 2012 Rukidiyah Israeli children’s dance festival, written by Doris Epstein, along with a link to Leon Balaban’s many excellent photos of the event.



Photo by Marc Baillargeon

*Yves Moreau and France Bourque-Moreau at Albanian workshop in Lachine, QB, April 21. ►*

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The following article is a continuation of the third of the series *Folk Dancing: Then and Now*

## Reaching Out: 1984–91, Part 2

By Stefania Szlek Miller

(continued from April issue)

**OFDA's 20th Anniversary Controversy:** By various accounts, the November 18, 1989 anniversary party was a huge success, with some 175 participants and performers from the “VillageFolk” ensemble and “Chai” Israeli dancers. Karen [Bennett] acknowledged this in her review in the January 1990 issue of the *Ontario FolkDancer*, but wrote: “The weakest element of the evening proved to lie in the request program, with many advanced dancers feeling that the program was targeted at the beginner and intermediate dancers to an excessive degree. Many of us attended the party in the hope of ‘dancing our buns off,’ to use a vulgarity, but had no opportunity to do so. I understand that a lot of people did have a great time, but I also know I was not the only person to feel bored, frustrated and disenfranchised.” Immediately following her review, Walter Bye added an editorial note: “Since by far the majority of those attending the party were beginners or intermediate level dancers, it is not surprising, but admirable that this should be reflected in the programming. Therein lies the mark of a good folkdance leader” (January 1990).

Karen's letter sparked many responses in the March 1990 issue. Marion Newlands and two anonymous letter writers (one signed “almost an advanced folkdancer”) seconded Walter Bye's assessment of OFDA's party, and congratulated OFDA for its promotion of social folk dancing. In the same issue, I wrote to Natasha: “In response to your earlier enquiry concerning the demise of folk dancing, you need to look no further than Karen Bennett's silly review of OFDA's 20th Anniversary party. Bravo to the Editor for his sensible rebuttal. Karen Bennett and all the other ‘advanced’ people should organize their own activities, and let the rest of us enjoy folk dancing.”

The debate raged into the April 1990 issue. A letter to Natasha from “One of the much-maligned hotshots” argued that the folk dance scene in the 1970s

was much less geared towards beginners, and that Karen's review “reflects the increasing frustration felt by so-called hotshots over the past ten years.” The writer concluded that it is the advanced dancers who give vitality to recreational folk dancing, and that the reason why so many beginner dancers give up is that dancers need to be challenged by more complex dances. “One can't live on pabulum forever.” Another anonymous letter writer took issue with Walter Bye's rebuttal to Karen's review, arguing that this seriously compromised the editorial integrity of the magazine. The letter writer also argued that people were getting tired of the same old dances and opined: “With no disrespect intended for our senior dancers, I was distressed by the high average age of participants.” Diane Gladstone's letter took issue with the whole debate, arguing that Karen's review should not have been published in the first place, and that articles in the magazine should be informative rather than opinionated. She worried that the battle over the review was akin to “doing one's dirty laundry in public.”

Two more letters concerning beginner-versus-advanced dancers appeared in the June 1990 issue. Just as revealing was Ruth Ostrower's review of the 1990 Ontario Folk Dance Camp at Waterloo. Ruth, a very accomplished dancer and folk dance instructor, broke with her usual upbeat reviews of camps and workshops by writing a critical one of the 1990 camp. She found Atanas Kolarovski's teaching of Macedonian dances difficult to follow, and noted that those participants who did catch on had attended many of his prior workshops to learn his dances. Joe Wallin's Scottish dances, according to Ruth, were geared too much at the beginner level. She concluded: “Overall, however, I think it was a much better experience for those who had never done Scottish dancing before, than for those who had never done Balkan dancing before” (June 1990).



Karen  
Bennett

Clearly Karen's review hit a nerve. The issue involved much more than programming for a party. The controversy raised questions about the very nature of what attracts us to folk dancing.

**Social Folk Dancing:** In my previous article (February 2012), I noted the increasing specialization of folk dance genres, whether Balkan, Israeli, Square or English country dancing. Does one go for depth in a specific genre or breadth in covering a wider range of dances? Does one concentrate on village-style folk dances or choreographed complex ones? For example, many of the dances in the international repertoire are based on choreographies of performing groups which require considerable skill and a lot of practice. Some folklorists even question whether these staged dances are really folk dances. Ted Zdybal lamented the balletic nature of Polish folk dance performing groups in his review of the "Slask" ensemble with its classically trained singers and dancers. He envied the Hungarians "because they have professional folk dance companies that only perform authentic folklore in the purest form such as Kodaly and the Bela Bartok Ensemble" (March 1990). Diana (Rush) Verseghe was less impressed with visiting Hungarian performing groups to Toronto. In her review of "Kodaly" in the December 1988 issue, she concluded that North American rock music was killing Hungarian "village folk music and dance as living art form." Edith Klein also wrote a critical review of the professional Belgrade State Folk Ensemble for its presentation of some of the regional dances from Yugoslavia as well as its operatic versus folk style of singing (April 1988). Ensembles that attempt a more diverse international folk dance repertoire face even greater challenges. This was evident in Walter Bye's otherwise very sympathetic review of a 1990 Toronto concert by "Les Sortilèges," Canada's only professional folk dance ensemble. He argued that "it is virtually impossible to dance the diverse styles of so many countries with the same passion and soul as the many national touring companies" (December 1990). Zdybal, among others, warned against amateur groups trying to emulate professional performance groups since their choreographies are geared for professionally trained dancers (March 1990). Yet it is the performance groups which inspire many of us in social folk dance groups.

How does one accommodate the performance type of dance within recreational folk dance circles?

Participants frequently do not attend regular weekly classes to learn a dance, or do not attend workshops by teachers, who once danced in performing groups and are teaching performance-style dances. Some folk dancers are also involved in performing groups where dances are rehearsed for many weeks in advance of any performance. How does one continue to enjoy the village type of simple dances with ordinary folk when one has performed at Carnegie Hall? (See Jane Aronovitch's report on performing with the George Tomov Ensemble in the September 1988 issue.)

Even the designation "beginner" versus "advanced" dancer is troublesome for recreational folk dancers. It is not like classical ballet with gradations of progressive achievement, as defined by professional dance schools. There is no single recognized authority to set the standard for all the diverse dances that we do – probably an impossible objective in any case. There are experts in specific folk dance genres, such as Miss Jean Milligan, who set the standard for what became the Royal Scottish Country Dance Association, with the Queen as patron. Groups belonging to this association practise and rehearse a number of set dances well in advance of a community ball, and then come armed with little booklets with cue notes for some 15 to 20 dances that will be danced in an evening. (See Walter Bye's review of the Tartan Ball, April 1989; also Douglas Worling's history of the Toronto branch of Royal Scottish Country Dance Society in the September 1990 issue.) Scottish societies emphasize style and technique as well as knowing dances without prompting, but I envy the relative shortness of the cue notes of Scottish set dances compared to the pages of complicated – beat by beat, measure by measure – instructions for even a relatively simple dance taught by Atanas Kolarovski.

My point is that what we do as international folk dancers is very challenging. Even at the height of the folk movement in North America (before Bob Dylan went electric), social folk dancing was never an activity that attracted a mass following. The elite few who continue to be drawn to social folk dancing love the variety of doing dances from many diverse regions – from Balkan dances to New England contras. As noted by Stew Shacklette, international folk dancers are noted for their willingness to learn new dances

outside their comfort zones (March 1987). While some international folk dancers are motivated to learn and retain more complex dances, others prefer simple village style with some free improvisation. Finding a balance between these two extremes is difficult and is more easily achieved within specific folk dance groups where the instructor or leader is aware of individual and group favourites. It is much more difficult at functions such as OFDA's anniversary party, which attract people from diverse groups as well as guests that have never tried folk dancing.

Karen did us a favour by raising issues that needed to be aired concerning the nature of international folk dance. She still holds the record for the volume of letters sent to the editor in response to her review. Despite the tone of the letters, we all remained friends and have danced "our buns off" on many occasions. As my previous articles indicated, there was and continues to be a significant evolution in social folk dancing. That evolution will continue as long as people still like to dance. The concerns about the demise of folk dancing noted in the 1989 exchange as well as in earlier issues of the *Ontario FolkDancer* (March 1987; April and June 1988), however, were premature. There were many thriving clubs. OFDA launched many outreach initiatives to attract new recruits such as the summer sessions at Harbourfront. There were well over 450 members in OFDA by 1990. It was a great time to be a folk dancer!

**Only in Canada, Eh!**: Toronto and other Ontario cities hosted numerous folk festivals, with many opportunities to join in and dance. We are fortunate to live in one of the most multicultural areas of the world. There were many articles in the *Ontario FolkDancer* about various ethnic groups as well as listings of ethnic radio programs and special events; this was a time before the Web provided easy access to such information. New waves of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean were also enhancing the multicultural mix in Ontario. These demographic changes were bound to affect social folk dancing since so much of our repertoire remains Eurocentric.

One certainly did not have to travel to foreign countries to get one's folk dance fix. Aside from the active Ontario international folk dance scene, the

annual Ontario Folk Dance Camp in Waterloo introduced us to outstanding instructors. One could also dance for a whole week at Bora Ozkök's Mid-American Dance (MAD) camps in Windsor. Outside of Ontario, there were many regular sessions and special workshops from the Maritime provinces to British Columbia. For many local dancers, however, Quebec was the place to dance away from home. Visitors to Montreal could dance with any number of international or Israeli groups, or join Yves Moreau's annual St-Lazare Bulgarian celebrations.

Many of us still remember Steve and Esther Csillag's dance camps at the lovely waterfront site of John Abbott College at Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue in Montreal. The annual week-long August camps, beginning in 1985, attracted hundreds of participants, with concurrent sessions for those who wanted to concentrate on specific teachers – such as Moshiko for Israeli dances, or Balkan teachers such as Montreal's own Yves Moreau, Pierre Gingras and Jocelyne Vaillancourt. The camps included many young French-Canadian dancers from performing groups in Quebec who participated in the workshops as well as gave superb performances at the evening parties (Molly Frankel's review in September 1985).

While camps offered many opportunities to dance, the Cornwall WorldFest/Festimonde Heritage experience offered a really unique combination of folklore and dance. Initiated by Yves Moreau, the week-long festival attracted international performing groups from all over the world. During the day sessions, we could learn about the cultures and dances from directors and performers of specific groups. Following evening concerts, many of the performers



*Moshiko at a "dinner out" at Montreal camp, 1992. To his right is Bev Sidney.*

and musicians would join us at late-night parties, with Yves and his compatriots Pierre Gingras and Germain Hébert leading international dances. It was a unique and exhilarating experience. One returned with stashes of folklore notes, new dances, a diploma, and lovely

memories. (See Ruth Ostrower's reviews of *Heritage* in October 1989 and 1990 issues.)



Photo by Judy Barnett

*Dancer from the Tibetan Song & Dance Ensemble at Heritage in Cornwall, 1995.*

Those who wanted to venture beyond Canada for a folk dance experience had many opportunities. Jane Aronovitch must hold the record for the number of travels to dance camps in Europe and the United States which she entertained us with in the *Ontario FolkDancer*. Jane, Joan Tressel (from Hamilton) and I attended Pece Atanosovski's July 1990 dance camp in Macedonia. (See Jane's article in the January 1991 issue.) By then, the drums of secessionist wars were already beating in Yugoslavia.

By the end of 1991, communism had collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union had

disintegrated. Those of us who love the music and dances of the former Yugoslavia were horrified by the genocidal massacres that ripped that country apart. The early '90s war in Iraq further destabilized the Middle East. The end of the Cold War did not yield a peaceful world order. Many of us found a brief respite or a haven from the awful political events in the international folk dance community.

**Tribute to Walter and Ruth:** On March 2, 1991, OFDA held an appreciation night in honour of Walter Bye and Ruth Ostrower for their work on the *Ontario FolkDancer* from 1974 (for Ruth) and 1975 (for Walter). Both of them also served terms as presidents of OFDA in the 1970s. (Story and pictures of the appreciation night are in the April 1991 issue; one of the pictures was reproduced on p. 6 of the April 2012 issue.) Their partnership was indeed a very creative one, especially during Walter's editorship with Ruth as production manager. Other major players contributing to the success of the magazine during this period were Margaret Whelan, who was responsible for securing advertising, and Helen Kirkby, who for many years compiled the long lists of upcoming events. Many others also contributed feature articles or reviews or wrote letters. The task of publishing timely and high-quality issues of the magazine, nevertheless, was mainly Walter and Ruth's responsibility. Walter estimated that between the two of them each issue of the magazine took some 40 to 50 hours of work (June 1988). Multiply that by seven issues per year, and one cannot but be impressed by their dedication.

Walter died on September 25, 1991 after a long illness; he was 41 years old. In the October 1991 issue, Ruth wrote a very moving tribute to Walter, as did Marg Murphy on behalf of OFDA. His legacy lives on in the words and images that he left behind. In his memory, folk dancers were invited to contribute to various causes, including the OTEA scholarship fund. The establishment of this scholarship was one of his initiatives amongst many contributions to the folk dance scene (January 1992).

**Acknowledgement:** I would like to express my appreciation to Karen Bennett, Jack Evans, Ruth Ostrower and Joan Tressel for their helpful comments and editorial corrections.

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# In Hurup, Denmark

By Nancy Nies

*Nancy Nies (pronounced “neese”; it’s a Dutch name) and her husband, Paul Gipe (pronounced “gype,” with a hard “g”; originally Geib, a German name), are long-time folkdancers who live in Bakersfield, California, northwest of Los Angeles. They joined OFDA in May 2009 and, says Nancy, “It was high time we did, since we had enjoyed the wonderful dance cafés – off and on, when we were in town – since 2004, the year of our first long stay in Toronto! We enjoy receiving Folk Dancer – a great way to keep up with our Canadian folk dance friends.” After writing a letter about Hungarian dance that appeared in the April issue (p. 4), Nancy was pitched the idea of submitting something for every issue, and said she’d “be pleased to contribute to the newsletter however I can. Folk dancing has given Paul and me some wonderful experiences in a number of countries, so I might have a few more short stories to share. As it happens, we leave on Easter Sunday [in April] to spend two weeks in England and Scotland on renewable energy business. Paul will be participating in a conference in Glasgow, and we hope to attend a ceilidh while we’re there.”*

April 2 – As with the Hungarian Café, Paul and I are sorry to have missed the recent Scandinavian one! It, too, spurred memories for us. In the fall of 1997, we spent several months in Denmark at a renewable-energy test center in rural northwest Jutland. While there we sought out the opportunity for folk dancing, and found a local group that met once a week. Thursday evenings soon became the highlight of our week. We would borrow the center’s “communal” car and drive to the community hall in the nearest town, Hurup. There, we would join in the two-, three- and four-couple Danish dances, which were especially challenging for us in that they were, naturally, called in Danish. Each week, at the halfway point in the evening, there would be an intermission when they set up tables and chairs, brought out desserts and thermoses of coffee, and sang from the Danish songbook. Though the Danes’ English was as limited as our Danish, we were touched by their warm welcome and, at the end of our stay, a tearful speech of farewell!



*Nancy Nies and Paul Gipe, February 2012, in a photo taken “at a Mardi Gras tea we hosted – hence the regalia!”*



Thank You!  
The OFDA would like to  
acknowledge Carl Toushan  
for his generous donation.

# *Spain to Toronto Via Croatia, Part 2*

**By Murray “Indiana” Forbes**

(continued from April issue)

*Folk dancers Murray Forbes and his wife, Lavinia, live in the town of Órgiva in southern Spain, whence they retired from Canada in 2009. In Part 1 of this travelogue, Murray and Lavinia drove from Spain to Croatia (where there was a dance seminar) via France, Italy and Slovenia, and then by a circuitous route flew to New York for the Western Hemisphere section of their adventures. Now read on...*

The route from New York to Toronto via Buffalo is very lovely, passing through the Catskill mountains and Finger Lakes, but we got to the border with some sense of adventure as GPS had it firmly in mind that we should have crossed Lake Ontario at Kingston, which is longer and not nearly as nice. Luckily we more or less knew our way but had important missions to complete before crossing the bridge. Firstly we had to fill up the car as fuel is much cheaper in the US but which is not easy to do once one gets to around Buffalo, and Lavinia had nostalgia for the sparse chain of American diners called Denny's where they have endeared themselves to us by defining “seniors” as anyone over 55, and we also wanted to find an outlet mall to buy some inexpensive US clothes. These missions involved a great deal of serious exploration around the Niagara Falls area. Language not being an issue, we nevertheless got many conflicting directions, including one to a Denny's that had closed down, and never did find the outlet malls that I know exist, but it was still early, and entering Toronto would have been no fun unless we waited for the rush hour to commence.

We were lucky in Toronto to have been able to borrow the apartment of Lavinia's ex-sister-in-law and so had a roof and parking. This was particularly fortunate as my brother and his family (wife and two teenaged daughters) were staying at my mother's and so there was absolutely no room for us there. In spite of the fact that many Torontonians go out of town to their cottages in August this is a very busy city, made much worse by the fact that all the roads were being repaired at the same time.

We enjoyed time with our busy children, family and friends and the big family gathering but have no traces of nostalgia for our home of 39 years. It is busy,

aggressive, hectic and now also expensive. Remarkably, we found that unlike just about everywhere else there is little or no sign of the worldwide economic collapse, and if anything there are now even more chi-chi restaurants in the place of normal shops, and the noisier and more expensive they are, the better they seem to do.

At this point I have to mention that communications on this trip were a major issue. I had travelled without a computer as my iPod can handle e-mails, simple Internet searches and Skype telephoning as long as it can find unlocked wi-fi. The only free wi-fi access that I could find in Toronto was hovering outside of Starbucks (we dislike the coffee or else we would have hovered more comfortably inside over some coffee) or loitering on a street corner near one of the local libraries (when they had not switched their wi-fi off). The other library had wi-fi but blocked access to Gmail for some unknown reason. To increase the challenges, in at least two of the places we visited, no sooner did we get there than the landlines went dead. This happened to us in Toronto, and it took nearly a week before the repairman arrived and replaced part of the cable system.

In principle, our return should have been a day's drive to New York, a plane ride to Kiev (with enough time to have a brief look round), then on to Budapest and a four or five days' drive, avoiding toll roads and Italy, back to Órgiva. Not so dull for “Indiana” Forbes.

Following a pleasant and uneventful drive across New York state to the outskirts of New York City and on to JFK airport to return our rental car on Friday 26th August, the traffic going the other way seemed to be worse than usual but we just put this down to

the Friday-evening exodus from New York City to escape the summer heat. Nevertheless, New York and the airport seemed to be in a state of excessive tension, and the driving was slow and rather frantic. Getting a hotel room was next to impossible and we finally found an expensive, extremely mediocre room whose sole merit was that it was within a free shuttle ride from the airport. It was in a kind of hotel ghetto without restaurants or any other infrastructure except awful indigestion: special pizzas delivered cold and eventually. The shuttle from the airport only went every hour, and we enjoyed pretty much the full hour's wait for ours. On arrival at the hotel there was a sign up to the effect that Hurricane Irene was heading directly for New York, which was being evacuated, and that all flights and other transportation would cease at midday Saturday. There was no information about our flight, which was scheduled to leave at 12:35 p.m. Saturday, either on JFK or Aerosvit's websites.

After a worried and bad night's sleep we decided to take the early shuttle to the airport to see if we could find out what was happening, not knowing where or how to evacuate New York in any event. At the airport, nearly all flights had been cancelled (and our flight was not even listed), there was no information desk, and Aerosvit's desk was unmanned, with a note to the effect that no one would be there until 9 a.m. (which did not happen) and a telephone number. Our cellphone could not find a network and there was no available wi-fi for the iPod. We then decided that we had better

get out of the airport and find some hotel somewhere and hope that we could avoid some of the horrors promised by all the news channels – being swept away by six-foot waves or our building being blown into orbit. All ground transportation had, however, by then closed down, including the skytrain. We returned to the terminal and determined that we needed to get out of New York by 'plane. Our options were not good. There was a flight to El Salvador embarking and one to Dubai and the last one out at 11:30 a.m. was to Port-of-Spain. We then, by some miracle and a great deal of help from the highly sympathetic Caribbean Airlines staff, managed to get the last two seats on the last flight out of New York, which, needless to say, did not leave until 12:30, and made its bumpy way away from the storm along a longer-than-usual but safer flight path to Trinidad.

It was rainy season in Trinidad but we had family there and in fact I was born there. My Trinidadian aunt died recently, leaving her magnificent seaside condominium to her six daughters, and it was vacant. We survived our exile in great comfort, therefore, which luckily relieved some of the pressure to try and get back to Europe.

Comfort aside, Trinidad was in a state of emergency, with nightly curfews to try and curb the large number of daily murders. We lived in peace and tranquillity in a safe part of town with an armed guard at the gate, behind prison-style multiple locked doors and massive burglar bars on each window. It is an enclave of elderly white Trinidadians where everyone knows everyone and their ancestors and, of course, their affairs. Outside of our ghetto it seemed safe enough. There are very few white people left and the real tension is between Indian and African Trinidadians, and most of the murders are drug-related. It is, however, not calm or tranquil with bedlam reigning on the streets, where too many cars vie with each other for too few roads and many a driver's licence has been bought rather than awarded. In general, there is quite widely held wealth in Trinidad, partly from the oil that has been found there and partly as a result of its proximity to Venezuela and as entrepôt for the illegal drug trade.

Ironically my cousins had only just got back from

Photos by Murray Forbes



*Our digs in Trinidad: a seaside condo belonging to cousins.*

Toronto, where they also participated in the large family event, and it was really strange to be seeing them so soon again in this very different context. We greatly enjoyed visiting Trinidad, where we were last at least 25 years prior. We went with my cousins swimming at two different beaches, and up into the mountains to a bird watchers' nature reserve. We also went on a boat trip to the Caroni saltwater swamps, which are also a bird sanctuary and where we got to see some boa constrictors and four-eyed fish and feed the mosquitoes in addition to the real purpose of the tour: to see the brilliant red ibis flying into their sleeping ground for the night. This was totally spectacular. We totally indulged all our favourite Trinidadian foods. I was even able to meet up with an old school friend from my school days in Cambridge, England, who lives in Trinidad.

It was indeed providential that we were not pressed for time to get out of Trinidad. As in Toronto, the telephones decided to pack up the moment we arrived at my aunt's house, and there was also no wi-fi there. Our first attempt at going to a travel agent was thwarted by an all-day power outage. Our next attempt, as with everything in Trinidad, required about an hour in line and then, in the very fullness of time, with my persistent prompting because I had already done the research on my cousin's computer, we were assured that we could fly to Frankfurt by a charter flight out of Tobago on Monday and that there were still ferry tickets left to Tobago for Sunday although nothing before. We took it immediately and were assured that the confirmation would be e-mailed to us within half an hour. Three telephone calls later and the end of the day and no e-mails had arrived. Naturally, the following day was Independence Day and the next Id-ul-Fitri, both holidays in Trinidad. On Friday we descended again on the travel agent with determination and attitude with my Trinidadian cousins, and after much discussion and playing on the computer eventually a confirmation was produced but with next-to-no information such as which terminal in Frankfurt airport and why the plane number changed in Barbados.

We had a most enjoyable Saturday walking around the savanna and visiting the eastern mountains to see

where some people had been held up at gunpoint the day before, and at the crack of dawn on Sunday we were on a smooth three-hour ferry ride half-way around the coast of Trinidad and on to Tobago. Tobago is a very attractive and low-key holiday resort island, and we stayed in a local hotel near both the airport and what is reputed to be the best beach on the island. It was very hot and humid, and swimming in the sea is not particularly refreshing, in my opinion. We ate local food from the food vendors and the next day wheeled our luggage right into the terminal. At the restaurant on the way in we shared a table with an Austrian couple who were also on their way to Frankfurt. They have been sailing every summer for the last umpteen years in a 62-foot yacht around the world, doing two or three months at a time. If I got the story right, this last hop was from Greenland to Tobago.

We had no very clear idea of how we would get from Frankfurt airport to Budapest. I had found on the Internet a low-cost Polish airline that ran flights out of Frankfurt Hahn airport but was unable to book online on my cousin's computer because they would



*In the mountains of eastern Trinidad.*

not accept my Spanish Visa card. Neither Frankfurt International nor Hahn airport websites had any information as how to get between the two airports. An e-mail to the Hahn airport authority, however, penetrated the secret and its schedule. Naturally we arrived at Terminal 1 and the shuttle left from Terminal 2, but there was also a skytrain between the two terminals. If this all worked out we ought to arrive at Frankfurt Hahn airport just in time to get a ticket on Wizz Air [a Hungarian low-cost airline—Ed.] if there were any seats left. Our alternatives were not good and would probably have required either an all-night bus ride or an expensive KLM flight with a plane change in Amsterdam. Luckily Germany is a very orderly place and everything does what it says it does, and we actually arrived safe and sound in Budapest in time to get a taxi to our hotel and reunite with our car which was intact and still on its wheels and to eat an excellent dinner at the restaurant recommended by our taxi driver.

It was a long, disagreeable drive from Budapest to Wiesbaden but we greatly enjoyed our destination. The hotel that we got online, ominously called Motel One, was very comfortable even though in the minimalist style. Wiesbaden is a grand old spa town with all the appearance of a prosperous past and present. Lavinia had lived there for a year when she was much younger. It is very charming and beautifully preserved. We enjoyed it so much that we decided to spend the next morning exploring there as well.

Once in France we told GPS to avoid tolls, which resulted in a lengthy and slow descent to Spain with many high-quality traffic jams, road works, enormous detours, and some long patches of traffic chaos. However, since an expensive crackdown on speeding, French drivers are now about the sanest in Europe, and the last high-speed chase occurred north of the border in Germany, where speed limits either do not exist or are totally ignored.

On the first night we reached Auxerre, which is an attractive little river town. We totally succumbed to French cuisine and pastries and wandered around the old city remembering what ambulation felt like. We found a charming hotel room behind a restaurant with a great view of the cathedral.

GPS then found the dullest route to the Pyrenees that one could imagine, carefully avoiding the beautiful Perigord and the Massif Central. We brought our next day to an end at Agen not having managed to cover as much ground as we had hoped because of the traffic issues. In Agen, the tourist information centre was still open and they managed to put us into a very comfortable hotel apartment right in the old part. It is an attractive town with a superb market, where we indulged the next morning.

Then GPS took us along some tortuous route in order to plonk us on the pay highway running towards the coast, so we sacked it and made our own way over the most spectacular road along the historic Tour de France bicycle route. It was a magnificent day for crossing the Pyrenees and definitely one of the other highlights of the trip. We had our gourmet picnic lunch high in the mountains feeding off the spoils from the market and patisserie in brilliant sunshine – superb.

Over in Spain we switched back to GPS but soon



*First-ever bunch of fruit (still too green to eat) on our banana sucker in Orgiva, which sprouted while we were (naturally) away.*

realized that it was going to send us along the boring Mediterranean pay highway into the high-theft areas of Valencia and Allicante, so sacked it again and took a lovely route from the *autovia* at Teruel towards Cuenca and then on towards Albacete and Jaen, stopping the night at the sleepy little town of Requena. Unfortunately, there was a wedding going on in the old part of Requena and not a hotel room to be found, but we found something uncharming but adequate in the new part and were able to stumble home by early afternoon (Spanish lunchtime). However, our security-minded friends had placed a padlock on our gate in response to some terrorism notes left on our front porch, probably written by children, judging from the handwriting. But we were back home, and wandering

over to the neighbours we got to borrow a phone and then track down the key and then walk to the key and have coffee and a chat with our friends before facing up to almonds and figs to be picked and other traumas of rural life – not to mention the influence of our trip to Tobago on our banana sucker, which has sprouted its first-ever bunch of bananas.

All in all, this was not a normal trip and athwart with many challenges, and eccentric enough to take in Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Ukraine, USA, Canada, Austria, Germany and back through France and Spain. Add an evacuation from a hurricane to Trinidad and Tobago, and it has to have been the strangest trip that we have done yet.

## *Steve Kotansky Albanian Workshop*

**By Karen Bennett**

On Saturday, April 21 and Sunday, April 22, I attended an Albanian workshop in Lachine, Quebec, taught by Steve Kotansky, with some live music provided by singer Merita Halili (born in Tirana) and her husband, accordionist Raif Hyseni (born in Kosovo). Accompanying me from Toronto were Terri Taggart and Fethi Karakeçili.

Two years before, Terri and I had attended a Bulgarian workshop with Iliana Bozhanova, also organized by Yves and France Moreau and Jocelyne Vaillancourt and held in the Les Éclusiers de Lachine hall, so we knew that this would also be a superbly organized event. (Lachine is about 15 kilometres from downtown Montreal, and Les Éclusiers de Lachine is an excellent amateur folk ensemble that has performed all over the world.)

Over the course of the workshop, we learned 13 dances (14 if you count the 10-measure and 17-measure versions of Devollice, entitled Valle Gerarçe and Valle Devollice respectively, as two separate dances): Do Marr Çiften, Valle e Përmetit, Vallja e Miratoces, Valle Kcim, Vallja e Podrimes and Valle Nuseve nga Korça on Saturday morning; Vallja e Bradeshesit, Valle Dyshe Krutane and Vallja e Rrajces on Saturday afternoon; and Valle e Prespes, Hajde Merre Furken, Devollice in its two versions, and Valle

***Folk Dancer***



*Merita Halili and  
Raif Hyseni  
perform  
Albanian songs  
on Saturday  
evening.*

Grash e Devollit on Sunday morning. (It will be noticed that the words “Valle” and “Vallja” recur a lot: they mean “dance.” Do Marr Çiften and Hajde Merre Furken are the names of songs.) Not only North, Central and Southern Albania were represented but Kosovo and the Albanian minority in Macedonia, by means of men’s, women’s, mixed-line, couple and solo dances.

The depth of Steve’s knowledge is astonishing, and he loves to search for (and analyze) new things. He told us he’d learned one of the things he was teaching us from dancing next to an Albanian man at an after-hours club on Staten Island, New York; the man later told Steve, “No one understood what I was doing before.”



*Steve Kotansky, supported by Yves Moreau, balances on the stomach of a Montreal Albanian during the Saturday party.*

Valle Nuseve nga Korça, one of my favourites from the workshop (the name means Bride's Dance from Korça; Korça is a region in the south), can be viewed on YouTube under the title Valle nga Përmetit at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHk9BZOiDyI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHk9BZOiDyI). It's almost identical to what Steve taught. My other favourite, Valle Kcim, from Kosovo, I'd learned from Steve at Stockton camp in 2010, and I was delighted to encounter it again. In addition to his other gifts, Steve has one for choosing appealing music.

Dancers came from all over to attend: from the United States; from Nova Scotia (after a 22-hour ride on a non-sleeper train!); from Quebec City, Gatineau, and Montreal and environs; and Ottawa and Toronto. Other Ontario dancers, from London (Rexi Ferati) and Toronto (Olga Sandolowich), had tried very hard to attend but were unable to make it.

Steve was accompanied by his wife, Susie, herself a superb and elegant dancer. They live in New Jersey, as do Merita and Raif.

At the Saturday evening party, many members

of the Montreal Albanian community turned out to dance with (and perform for) us, and the Albanian Ambassador to Canada and her husband drove down from Ottawa. The party began with a mini-concert by Merita and Raif, who also did dance-songs for us (including Valle Jarnana, in whose chorus I joined). Later in the evening, selections from the international dance repertoire (such as Lee Otterholt's choreography of Çobankat, with arms held up, I was pleased to note) were put on, and the party did not end till after midnight.

Following the Sunday session were a brunch and culture corner (including a singing session!) which the Toronto contingent had to miss, as we had to hit the road.

When I asked my Toronto friend Fethi what he'd thought about the event, he replied, "It was funny that during the first workshop break, Steve Kotansky came up to me and asked if I am Albanian. He said, 'But you look like them and dance like them!'"

Steve, Merita and Raif will be together again at the East Coast Balkan Camp in the Iroquois Springs resort near Rock Hill, New York, August 11–18 (<http://eefc.org/isTeachingStaff.shtml>).



*Photos by Susie Kotansky*

*Steve Kotansky and a Montreal Albanian perform on Saturday evening.*

# OFDA's Finnish and Scandinavian Café

By Karen Bennett

The Finnish and Scandinavian café, held on March 31 at the Ralph Thornton Centre in Toronto, featured a performance and teaching by the Toronto Nordic Dancers.

The Nordic countries are comprised of Denmark and the autonomous Faroe Islands and Greenland; Finland and the autonomous Åland Islands; Iceland; Norway; and Sweden. Although English-speakers tend to lump Finland in with “Scandinavia” for reasons of geography, history and a desire to save words, this is incorrect—and so is lumping Swedes in with Vikings, as one Swede told me long ago in a reproving tone. Scandinavia, a region that encompasses the three countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway—all of which have a common ethno-cultural heritage and related languages—should *not* be conflated with the Scandinavian Peninsula, on which mainland Finland sits. (Estonia, whose language is a close relative of Finnish, is sometimes considered a Nordic country as well.) Hence the title of this OFDA café: “Finnish *and* Scandinavian.”

The Toronto Nordic Dancers were drawn from the Toronto Danish Folkdancers, led by Laine Ruus, who put the evening's program together; the Toronto Swedish Folkdancers, led by Raul Selberg; and the Toronto SISU Finnish Folkdancers, led by Anita Nutikka. These groups often merge for special occasions. (Toronto boasts no Norwegian ensemble.) About 20 Nordic couples turned out to dance with and entertain us; some of them (such as Dorothy Sloan and Peter Renzland) are, or used to be, international folk dancers as well. We had a wonderful time. In honour of the event, I wore a costume from Ilmajoki in western Finland.

First we were treated to a performance of:

- Langdans, a Danish song adapted from a 19th-century German political protest song that the group walked into the room while singing.
- Menuett från Lappfjärd, Finland: a minuet, adopted from France;



Photos by Al Katz

*Laine Ruus, dressed as a Danish man, explains the Toronto Nordic Dancers' program for the evening.*

- Kikari, a quadrille from Finland; quadrilles became popular all over Europe in the 19th century;
- Engelska från Stigtomta, Sweden: a longways country dance adopted from England; and
- Ränningen, a Swedish play-dance that imitated spinning and weaving.

Hambo music was put on, and the café attendees got through this classic Swedish dance as best they could, as skill levels varied and the dance couldn't be taught in the time available. But then the teaching *did* start, and we learned four dances:

- Enkel Engelska, from Sweden (a mixer with grand right and left, adopted from England; instructions at [www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/02engel.htm](http://www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/02engel.htm); music from Gunnar Hahn's *Scandia* CD, track 2), taught by Raul Selberg;
- Ti-Ti-Tyy Jenkka from Finland (a mixer in schottische rhythm; our music, from the *Skandia* CD, track 5, got faster and faster, but some recordings do not; instructions at [www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/05titivity.htm](http://www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/05titivity.htm)), taught by Anita Nutikka;



- Totur II, from Denmark (*Scandia* CD, track 4; instructions at [www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/04totur2.htm](http://www.folkdancing.com/Pages/skandia/04totur2.htm)), taught by Laine Ruus; and
- Linerender (sic) from Norway (a solo dance choreographed by Alix Cordray based on a Reinlender; instructions are in the 2005 Stockton camp syllabus at [www.folkdancecamp.org/old\\_syllabus/FDC2005.pdf](http://www.folkdancecamp.org/old_syllabus/FDC2005.pdf)), also taught by Laine Ruus.

The “Nordics” informed us that new members are welcome, no matter their ethnicity or dance experience, and that all teaching is in English. The Finns rehearse on Sundays; the Swedes, on Wednesdays; and the Danes, every other Friday. More information, including videos, can be found on the Nordic dance website, <http://dancing.org/nordic.html>.



*Doing the Norwegian solo line dance Linerender. In the middle of the photo is Peter Renzland; to his right is Karen Bennett in Finnish costume; behind them is Joy Alpert; at far left is Swedish teacher Raul Selberg.*

## International Dance Day 2012

On Sunday April 29, OFDA sponsored an International Dance Day event. IDD was introduced in 1982 by the International Dance Committee of the International Theatre Institute, a UNESCO partner non-governmental organization, and is celebrated on April 29 every year. The date commemorates the birthday of Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810), the creator of modern ballet.

This year’s event was held from 2–5 p.m. at Kimbourn Park United Church in Toronto, and featured teaching by Riki Adivi, Dorothy Archer, Judith Cohen, Fethi Karakeçili, Marylyn Peringer,

Olga Sandolowich, Judy Silver and Stephania Woloshyn.

Numerous international folk dancers turned out to support the event. Also among the 60-plus participants were some Irish students who happened to be in town doing work internships. Four members of the Lemon Bucket Orkestra brought an hour of live music plus several enthusiasts/participants from the previous night’s Feria Upside-Down event. Stephania Woloshyn of the Orkestra taught (or reviewed, for those who attended last November’s OFDA café) several Ukrainian dances.

Photo by Bev Sidney



- ◀ *Judith Cohen (holding tambourine), her daughter Tamar, and Lemon Bucket Orkestra (LBO) musicians Jaash Singh, Mark Marczyk and Tangi Ropars present music and dance on IDD. The previous evening they had joined with several other bands of the Fedora Upside-Down collective at Feria Upside-Down, an evening of music, food, drinks and folk culture with a Spanish flavour that was well-received by a crowd of young Torontonians. The 14 members of LBO ([www.lemonbucket.com](http://www.lemonbucket.com)) are keen to provide music for dancer, and will be making a trip to Romania this year in order to widen their horizons.*



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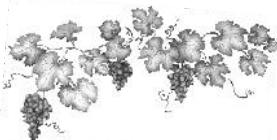
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## The Back Page...

On April 30, Adam Kossowski taught an international workshop in Rochester, NY.

Bev Sidney, visiting friends in Brighton, Ontario, came across Judy Barnett walking her dog along a country road. Judy reported that she and her sister are enjoying their small-town life, and that for some time she has been running a small but enthusiastic folk dance class.

OFDA executive member Mirdza Jaunzemis went from Hamilton to the Salt Spring Island Festival in BC at the end of April. There she met up with fellow executive member Maya Trost, who has been wintering in Vancouver. Teaching at the festival this year were Željko Jergan (Croatian) and Richard Schmidt (Polish).

Terri Taggart will be attending the 13th Seminar of Greek Dance, led by Kyriakos Moisidis (<http://moisidis-dance.gr/>), in Thessaloniki from July 22–August 3. The seminar will focus on the region of Serres in central-east Macedonia. Serres is home to Macedonians, Vlachs, Sarakatsans and Gypsies (Roma), as well as more recent refugee settlers from the former Greek regions of Pontos, Cappadocia, coastal Asia Minor and eastern Thrace.

Our condolences go to Yves Moreau, whose only brother, Jean-Guy Moreau, died in Montreal on May 1, aged 68. Jean-Guy was a very well-known and much-loved figure in Quebec – he was a brilliant mime, comic and impersonator, often as a political satirist, and was a recipient of the Order of Canada. News of his death was on every Montreal radio station, English and French, and in all the papers, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages made an official statement. A write-up in English can be found online at [www.montrealgazette.com/news/Comedian+reamer+heart/6563706/story.html](http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/Comedian+reamer+heart/6563706/story.html).

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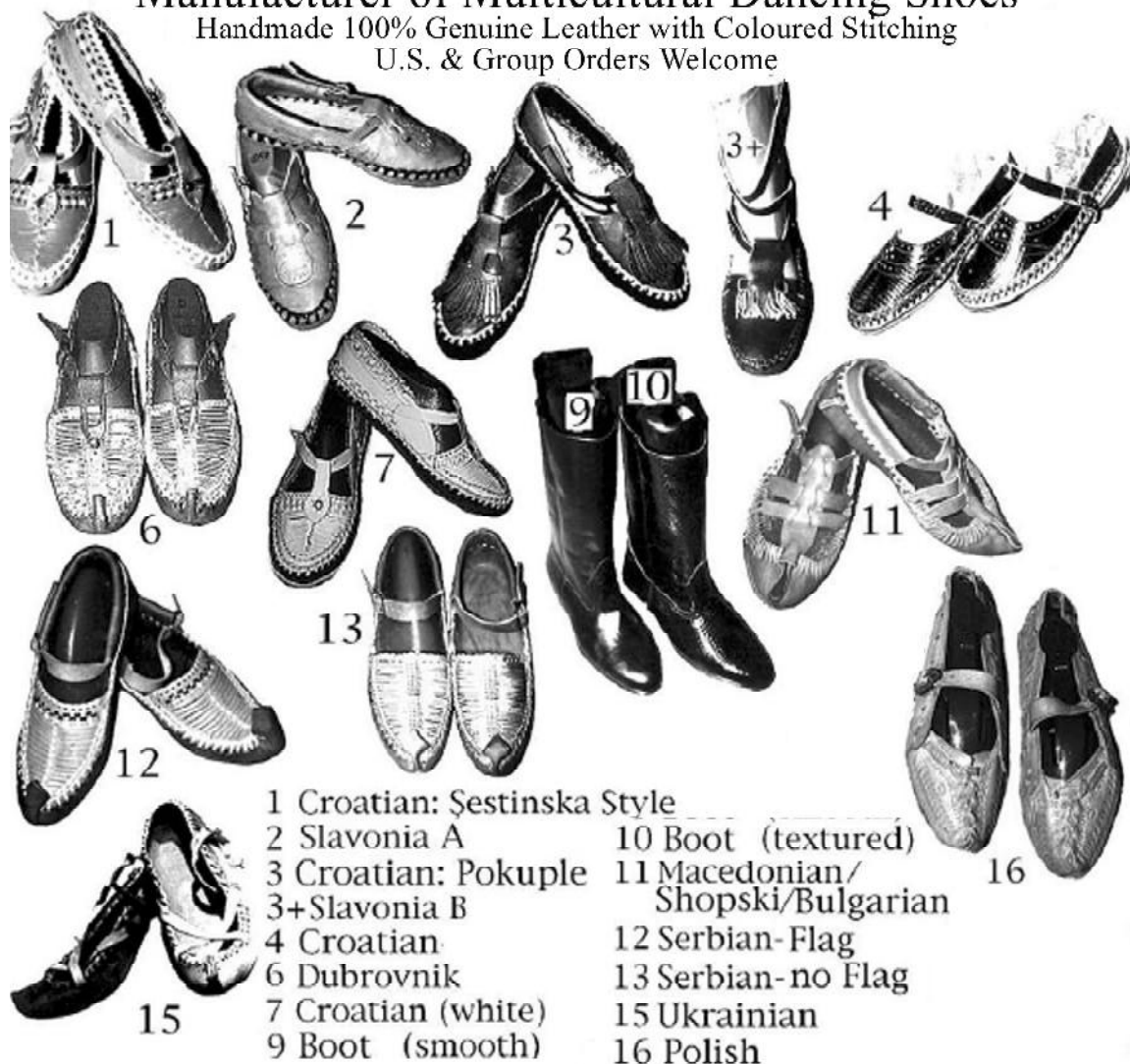
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