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Cover Image: Olga Sandolowich at 90th Birthday Party, with rose crown created by Joan Tressel.
Photo: Jack Evans. See p.6.

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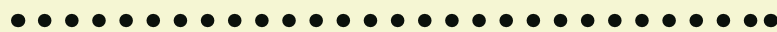
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Septuagenarian: Octogenarian: Nonagenarian

by Dorothy Archer

Nonagenarian. Get used to it. You probably already know octogenarian and even septuagenarian and have either wrapped yourself in the impressive word or it is looming in your life. Olga Sandolowich and Carl Toushan, featured in this issue, are not the first folk dancers to be dancing in their nineties – it has become quite a common thing, so you can expect to be there too. I probably won't be around, not editing this publication at any rate, but you might still get a feature article or, at least, an honorable mention.

If you have danced with Olga and Carl, you have known quality. It is a pleasure to watch them and be inspired. Despite illness from time to time, they both bounce back and show us how it should be done. We are fortunate to have them in our lives.

The Hamilton Folk Dancers threw a party for Olga and Carl which drew a big crowd. Helena Adamczyk and Joan Tressel have written a report about the evening with photos, so if you didn't make it, you can enjoy it now. Stefania Miller has written tributes to both Olga and Carl, whom she has known and danced with for many years. We are pleased to have them so honoured.

Well, Mirdza Jaunzemis and Murray Forbes have been travelling again and sending stories of their trips. Do go to the website and read about Murray's adventures securing visas for Russia and travelling to Greece via Russia. You wonder why such a route? Well only Murray would do it and he tells us why. Mirdza gives us her usual detailed vision of the country she has visited, in this case Romania, with lots of history and other details and you will know more when you finish than when you started.

Nancy Nies has written two articles for this issue. Her usual column is about Tibetan monks and she has included a link to a video with wonderful costumes. Her other article is about her husband, Paul Gipe, and his early days of dancing in a performance group. Those who have danced with Paul and know his high energy level and proficiency in dancing will enjoy the image of a young man wondering what it is all about.

The café In November was memorable not only because of the new location but also due to the interesting program of First Nations dancing and costumes. Our thanks to Sheryl Demetro for writing about it. Another party was held New Year's Eve at the Adivi home. Please go to the [OFDA website](http://www.ofda.ca) to enjoy the photos.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

The Dancing Monks of Tibet

by Nancy Nies

Imagine, if you can, a lush green valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains, and a picturesque town in that valley – a peaceful place believed to have mystical powers. Now, imagine an unusual book shop in the town, with shelves of books lining both inside and outside walls, where a sign invites customers to slip payment through the door slot if the shop is closed. Sound a bit like the utopian Shangri-La?

Well, as a matter of fact, the town is Ojai, California, and the Ojai Valley was chosen by Frank Capra to depict Shangri-La in his 1937 film, *Lost Horizon*. Ojai has long attracted artists and writers, healers and spiritual seekers. On a recent visit to Bart's Books – the shop described above – I was not surprised to find the title *Moines Danseurs du Tibet*, with French text and stunning photos by French geneticist-turned-Buddhist monk, Matthieu Ricard.

The 1999 book, later published in English as *Monk Dancers of Tibet*, presents the dances of Tibetan Buddhism, in which every gesture, mask, and costume has spiritual significance. For the monks, dance is a meditative practice and a teaching tool, as well as their gift to the gods and to the lay community at holidays and festivals.

Tibetan monks – exiled in India, Nepal and Bhutan since China's 1950 occupation of Tibet – preserve their legacy



Monks perform the Dance of the Black Hats, a cham dance associated with Tibetan Buddhism, at a festival in Bhutan on 19 April 2006.

by performing the sacred dances and creating the elaborate masks and costumes for them. Ricard's photography captures the monks' dancing at Shechen monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The monks' year-end ritual dances (in February) are intended to clear obstacles, such as negative emotions, from the path to the new year. In the dramatic Dance of the Black Hats, for example, the colourful costumes feature large black headdresses decorated with skulls and aprons embroidered with fierce-looking faces meant to tame feelings of hatred, greed and ignorance. [Watch a short video of the dance here.](#)

Though many places in the Himalayas claim to be the setting of the fictional Shangri-La, it was in California's Shangri-La that I learned of the dancing monks of Tibet.

A Birthday Celebration

Olga Sandolowich 90 and Carl Toushan 92

by Helena Adamczyk and Joan Tressel



Photo: Marjan Petkovski.

Vlasto, flanked by Olga and Carl.

Over 70 people attended the party in honour of Olga and Carl at the Hamilton International Folk Dance Club (HIFDC) on November 22, 2019. The theme was Macedonian, with Vlasto Petkovski introducing some new dances and others from his repertoire. Other guests included a strong representation of international folk dancers from Toronto and other clubs as well as from the Macedonian community.

While Olga was not able to dance because of medical issues, she chair-danced tapping her feet, and enjoyed socializing with friends. In her thank you letter to the Hamilton club, she indicated that by spring she will be back to “the noisy and dancing Olga” that we all know and love. Carl, who also had some medical problems this fall, was back in top form leading some of his favourite dances including Dedo Mili Dedo. The photo gallery and written tributes prepared by Stefania Miller included some good shots of Olga from

the 1950s onwards, and of Carl, one of the founding members of HIFDC in 1984.

At half-time, a massive cake with nine plus two red roses was wheeled out, and we wished Olga and Carl many more years of dancing as they blew out the candles. While many participants went to the upstairs parlour for cake and refreshments, those who preferred to dance than eat stayed to continue dancing. Once everyone was back on the dance floor, Vlasto briefly reviewed the new dances. We also danced Ne Klepeci in memory of Martina Freitag’s mother, who died November 18th and Paul Tressel’s father, who died November 17th. The evening ended with Veličkovo and Makedonsko Devoјče. Hardy dancers who stayed until after 11:00 p.m. congregated for a group photo around Olga and Carl.

Special thanks to Vlasto and his family as well as the other participants who contributed to the success of the evening and to those who brought food for the bountiful refreshment table. Congratulations to Stefania and the Hamilton folk for organizing a memorable celebration. It was a fitting tribute to Olga and Carl.



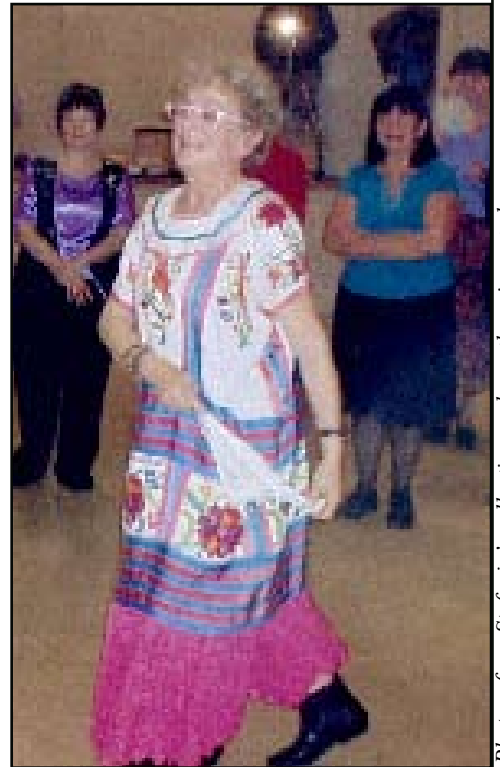
Photo: Rick Adamczyk.

Olga Veloff Sandolowich

by Stefania Szlek Miller

It is an honour to celebrate Olga's 90th birthday, marking many good years of generous friendship and her lifetime dedication to the promotion of arts, folk dancing, and Canadian multiculturalism.

In 1978, Olga was one of 21 artists (others included Margaret Atwood and Veronica Tennant) selected by the Ontario Government for an exhibit *We Among Others* at Canadian Cultural Centres in Paris and London, followed by an exhibition in Toronto. In 2010, she was granted The United Macedonian Diaspora Outstanding Achievement Award in recognition of 59 years of excellence and outstanding contributions in the arts. In 2019, that adds up to 68 years of contributions to the arts and folk dancing. Congratulations, Olga!



Olga's 80th Birthday Party in Hamilton.

Olga's passion for dance and the arts started in her youth. An early 1950s photo shows a foreboding Olga in a ballet based on Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* at the Toronto New Dance Theatre. She became one of the leaders and teachers of the international folk dance movement in Toronto in the 1960s, along with Al Gladstone, Teme Kernerman and Ernie Krehm. In 1981, the Ontario Folk Dance Association recognized their contribution to folk dancing with an OTEA Scholarship in their names.



1953 Ballet Lysistrata.



Al Gladstone, Olga and Ernie Krehm, 1970 Mariposa Festival.

Photo: from Olga's collection.

Photos: from Stefania's collection, unless otherwise noted.

Photo: from Olga's collection.

Aside from teaching workshops in Canada and abroad, Olga continues to lead the Don Heights Folk Dancers founded in 1973 and teaches in other Toronto groups. For many years, she was the artistic director of the Seljani Macedonian Folklore Performing Group.

Olga continues to be a major supporter of the Hamilton International Folk Dance Club. She has introduced over thirty dances to our group over three decades, and many of them remain an integral part of our ongoing repertoire. This includes Ilu Tsiporim (introduced in 1986), Debka Oud, Sulam Ya'akov, Godečki Čačak, Syrtos Pyleas, Vulpiuta, Horehronsky Čzardáš, Mason's Apron, and a

novelty dance like Louisiana Saturday Night. We are particularly grateful to her for sharing with us her Macedonian heritage with dances like Ovcepolsko Oro, Strumicka Petorka, Shar Planina *and* Prva Ljubov. She floored us with her calls and energy doing Dajčovo Horo – Zizaj Nane but we can only do that dance with her in the lead.



HIFDC's first workshop with Olga, 1986.



*Under all the feathers –
Ginger Northcott and Olga!*

She has joined us for many Hamilton folk dance celebrations including our Macedonian workshop with Pece Atanasovski in 1992, an event that Olga facilitated, and our club's 10th anniversary with Hamilton's Boys from Bouf Band. We could count on her to dress up for our Hallowe'en parties – the chicken outfit still stands out. We have shared many other anniversary and special occasions with Olga, including her 80th birthday in 2009.

Olga is an inspiration for all of us to keep on dancing!

Carl Toushan

by Stefania Szlek Miller



Carl's 90th birthday, 2017.

Carl is one of the founding members of our club, serving on the Hamilton International Folk Dance Club executive since 1984. We appreciate his enormous contributions to the club's success and the joy he brings to our group. We mark his 92nd birthday by presenting him with an Honorary Lifetime Membership.

Carl's natural affinity for Macedonian and other Balkan rhythms is evident in dances like Dedo Mili Dedo, Belasičko, Pouscheno, Karamfil, and Orijent. He stands out with his proud posture, strong arms, and remarkable knees. Carl and his partner Karen Walker are gracious and elegant dancing to English Country and other couple dances.



Carla (Carl) jumping out of birthday "cake", 1990.

Carl is a gentleman with an infectious sense of humour. We have enjoyed his performances, whether jumping out of a cake as "Carla," or belly dancing for one of Joan Tressel's birthdays. We celebrated his 80th birthday in 2007 with a mock Model-T in recognition of his other great passion – restoring antique cars. We marked his 90th birthday in 2017 with a Regency Ball called by Dale Hyde with Steve Fuller's band. We had a Macedonian party for him on his 91st birthday with Vlasto

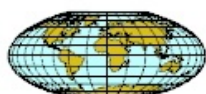
Petkovski as guest instructor. We are happy that he and Karen could visit Carl's ancestral homeland in 2018 with Vlasto's tour of Macedonia. We wish him many more happy years of dancing.



Dancing in 1994.

Photos: from Stefania's collection.

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Dancing with Daigozivo: Experience of a Lifetime

by Nancy Nies

Before Paul Gipe, my husband of 30 years, moved to California in 1984, he spent ten years in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It was a memorable decade for him, one book-ended by his introduction to folk dancing and his participation in a performing dance group. So exhilarating was the latter that, 35 years later, Paul calls it “one of the highlights of my life.”

Soon after Paul’s arrival in Harrisburg, an acquaintance invited him to a folk dance class. Paul agreed to go but now says that he had no idea what he was getting himself into. Not having done much dancing of any kind, he found the class challenging, if not embarrassing. He stuck with it, however, and eventually began to enjoy it.

The Harrisburg area afforded other dancing opportunities as well. Just four miles down the Susquehanna River was the town of Steelton, populated by Eastern Europeans – lots of Serbs and Croats in particular – who had come to work in the steel mills. During the summer, there would be festivals in what was known as Serb Park, with folk dancing outdoors under a canopy. It was here that Paul realized that the simple dances allowed everyone to participate and to dance with people you didn’t know. He has fond memories of dancing with the Eastern Europeans of Steelton, describing it as “the real thing.”

In 1981, two accomplished Harrisburg dancers – Anne Shuster and Larry Hoy – formed a by-invitation-only performing group, calling it Daigozivo (a Bulgarian term meaning “Give it life”.) Paul was pleased to be asked to join as one of the eight founding members. Within a year or so, ten other dancers had joined them. The group’s repertoire included dances from Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, and what was then Yugoslavia, performed at many local and regional festivals in Pennsylvania, as well as at out-of-state events.



Daigozivo men dance before a crowd in downtown Harrisburg in the early 1980s. Paul Gipe is second from the left. The Pennsylvania State Capitol building is visible in the background.

Photo: David Laughery.



Photo: David Laughery.

Paul Gipe (far right) and Jerri Laughery (third from right) dance with Daigozivo at the Rutherford House, near Harrisburg.

Jerri Laughery, another of the original eight dancers, has great memories of Daigozivo's glory days. She performed with the group during the five years it existed and her husband, David, was the group's photographer.

According to Jerri, the dancers did not do costume changes during the first year. That changed in 1982, when a costume expansion was spurred by a new dancer's connections in New York City's garment district. Jerri was one of the dancers who traveled to New York to acquire surplus fabric. They did research on each country's traditional dress, says Jerri, and made costumes representing the countries whose dances they performed. On additional trips to New York City, they purchased Romanian blouses and ordered boots custom-made by a Russian boot-maker—black for the men, and red for the women. Paul remembers



Photo: Courtesy of Danielle Houser.

At a Chrysanthemum Festival at Longwood Gardens near Philadelphia in the mid-1980s Daigozivo women perform a Hungarian dance. Danielle Houser faces the camera.

making the trip to be sized for the boots: “It was right out of a movie... a big deal for me. I was very poor then, and the \$100 for the boots was a lot. I still have those boots.”

Fellow Daigozivo dancer, Danielle Houser, tells of three experiences with the group, each one impressed upon her memory for a different reason. She remembers what was by far the most gorgeous setting for a performance at the Longwood Gardens (Pennsylvania) Chrysanthemum Festival. She also recalls an incident that occurred during a performance in Reston, Virginia: “During a belt-hold Bulgarian dance, the person at the center of the line lost footing and the entire line caved but no one fell. We kept moving...and pulled off a finish that looked like the slip was part of the performance.” Another special memory: the excitement of performing at a Bulgarian Festival in New York City, and of dancing in the streets with people from many countries “who didn’t need to speak the same language to have a great time together.”

Paul danced with Daigozivo for three years before moving to California. Looking back, he says, “It was an important time in my life, and dancing was central to that.” While he was a member, he says, the group’s most ambitious endeavour and crowning achievement was the staging of a full dance concert at a local theatre before a large and appreciative audience. Many hours of strenuous rehearsals – “Lots of sweat,” says Paul – and the occasional interpersonal conflict made membership in the group demanding, both physically and emotionally. When it all came together onstage, however, it was what Paul calls “a transcendent experience...what life is supposed to be.”



Photo: David Laughery.

In early 1984, Daigozivo stages a full dance concert at a Harrisburg theatre.

Transylvania, Romania

by Mirdza Jaunzemis

In June 2019, I joined Sonia Dion and Cristian Florescu for a tour of Romania, mainly in the Transylvania area of the country. My travelling companion was Sue Nelson from California, and there were a few other familiar faces that I had met from previous trips and Mainewoods. In total there were 44 people plus Sonia and Cristian, and Camelia and Neluțu, our Romanian guides and teachers. There were six people from Hong Kong, two from Singapore, eight from Canada, one from the U.K., three from Mexico, and the rest from the U.S.



Sue, Sonia, Mirdza and Cristian.

Photos: Mirdza Jaunzemis.

Romania has the shape of a fish, with its mouth pointing inwards toward the Balkan countries and its tail at the Black Sea. Thus, there is some controversy whether it is part of what is referred to as the Balkan countries. The Carpathian Mountains and the Transylvanian Alps form natural barriers within the country, and the Danube forms a natural southern border with Bulgaria. The Prut and Tisza rivers on the eastern and northern sides also form natural borders partway around the land.

As with all other European countries, Romania has been affected by religious, political, cultural and historical influences from its neighbours. The Romans invaded this area (called Dacia) around 106 CE, and stayed for about 165 years. Thus, this area became known as an island of Latin culture in a sea of Slav tribes. Its language also is considered to be a romance language, similar to French, Spanish and Italian. The Austro-Hungarian Empire once included the northern part of Romania, and as a result, there are many cultural and other influences still to be found here. During the Communist era (early 1960s until 1989) the dominant ruler of the country was Nicolae Ceausescu; his regime was considered to be the most totalitarian and repressive in the Eastern Bloc. Since his overthrow in 1989, the country is still dealing with the aftermath of this regime.

Some information about life in Romania today: there is high family stability, with traditional marriages and around two children per family. Both parents usually work with grandparents helping with the children. Often one parent works in another country, because wages there are

better. Health care is free, but pensions are quite low. Its population is about 19.6 million but lately this number has declined somewhat (about four million people since 1993), due to high mortality, low birth rates and emigration. Divorce rates are low, and abortions are legal. There are universities in Romania which are free, but many students also study abroad.

Our trip centered in Transylvania, with a foray into Maramureş, in the northwestern part of Romania. The word Transylvania means “beyond the forest”; it is known for its forests, and gold and salt mines. When Transylvania is mentioned to westerners, we often think of Bram Stoker’s vampire, Dracula. In truth, this story is loosely based on a real-life ruler of the area, Vlad Tepes (Vlad the Impaler). His father, Vlad Dracul, was a member of the Order of the Dragon, and *Drac* can be translated in Romanian to mean “dragon” or “devil”. Vlad Tepes’ favourite method of torture was to impale criminals and anyone who tried to invade his territory. He had learned this method of punishment from the Ottomans who had taken him hostage at the age of 10 in 1442. When the Turks invaded Wallachia (an area in Romania), they soon fled because Vlad had 20,000 of their men impaled at the border. But obviously this person did not come from Transylvania, except in Bram Stoker’s mind. Bran castle (purported to be Dracula’s home) is located near Brasov in the south-central part of Romania, and houses artifacts and other memorabilia; it is a haunting, dramatic structure – somewhat macabre, because of the film treatment of this story. However, the thought now is that Vlad had no real connection to this place; it was a marketing ploy to increase tourism – and it worked.

Transylvania is home to descendants of the Hungarians, Germans, Slavs, Saxons, Szeklers, Csangos, and Roma. The dominant religion is Romanian Orthodox but during the 1550s Calvinism was brought to Cluj-Napoca, and is still a force in this region. The Unitarian church in Romania also has its headquarters in Cluj, and there are some Lutheran congregations (introduced during the time of the German and Hungarian presence). In addition, Jesuits still have their schools in Romania. In the Orthodox tradition, people do not sit during a three-hour service; there are no pews except for the older or infirm people. There are no instruments to guide the singing – all is a cappella. There is a section in the church that is partitioned off by the iconostasis, and only the priest can go in this area. At certain times, men are allowed behind this screen, and once a year women can walk through this section to view the altar.

We stayed mainly in Cluj-Napoca, with two nights in Vadu Izei. The Romans built a citadel at the site of Cluj-Napoca 2000 years ago and called it *Castrum-clus*; it was one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire. Today it has a population of about 310,000 with many medieval churches, nine small universities dedicated to different spheres



Mirdza with Neluțu and Camelia.

of learning, palaces and museums. The botanical garden near our hotel was an inviting spot; it also serves as a teaching and study location. That evening we met Camelia and Neluțu. They are from Cluj, and teach traditional Romanian dances from this region: variations on the Csardas and other dances influenced by the Hungarians and Roma – for example, Invertița, with lots of spins and turns for the ladies; clapping and stamping for the men. They are quite challenging to execute, and the trick for women is not to get dizzy. They are also very improvisational in nature, thus, when watching a group, many of the men (and boys especially) are doing different things at different times.

The ethnographic museum in Cluj covered a lot of areas of endeavour: farming, hunting, sheep shearing, and herding when people lived a simple agrarian life to the more sophisticated and complicated era which produced pottery, leather embroidered vests and cooking utensils. But by far the most interesting section to us was that of their national costumes. There are 120 ethnographic regions in Romania, each with its own style of costume. Not all of these were displayed here, but there were many representative samples. As our guide explained the different features of many of them, Camelia and Neluțu demonstrated dances that came from the various regions – and they are beautiful dancers. We noticed that out on the street many women wear ethnic blouses as part of their daily outfits – they are keeping their traditions alive.



Example of an embroidered leather vest.

The next day we went to the Alba Iulia fortress, also called the Alba Carolina Citadel. It is the biggest fortress in Romania and is the site of the signing in 1918 of the act of Unification of Transylvania, Banat, and other regions into one Romania. Its purpose was to keep invaders, mainly Turks, out. It has seven bastions with walls three meters thick at the base and one and one-half meters at the top. It has six gates, with a seventh secret gate that was used by soldiers to be able to pass in and out



Alba Carolina Citadel.

of the fortress without being seen. In spite of being destroyed by the Mongols in 1241, it was rebuilt and the cathedral was built in 1247, using Roman stone weighing 500 kilos each. Michael the Brave, hero of the successful emancipation from the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs, controlled most of Romania in the sixteenth century and is remembered as the first person to bring some

sort of unity to Romania. As a symbolic gesture of solidarity with his people, his crown was made of iron, not silver or gold. There are two beautiful and imposing churches in close proximity within its grounds, one Roman Catholic and the other Romanian Orthodox. When the Red Army invaded Romania, the local people hid portraits of the orthodox leaders so that they would not be destroyed. The 100th year of the independence of Romania was celebrated here in 2018.

On the way to Vadu Izei the next day, we stopped at the Ethnographic Museum of Maramureş, an outdoor museum displaying styles of homes from the 17th and 18th centuries and from various cultures: Slavic, Jewish, Hungarian, German and Romanian. Many of these were the original structures which had been moved to this area. There were also three beautiful wooden churches, typical of this region. In the oldest home, there were two rooms: one for storage, the other for everything else. Oak was the most common building material but the floors were hard-packed dirt. The foundations of the home were huge boulders, and of course, there were no basements. Chinks in the outer walls were filled with a mixture of straw and horse manure – it is free of bacteria. The doorway was quite low, for the following reason – one had to bow upon entering the house. Houses did not have chimneys as we do in the west; instead, they had several vents in the roof that opened at the bottom, through which the smoke from fires would escape; they were situated in such a way that rain would not come into the house. Also, the two parts of a roof did not meet at the apex; instead one side was higher and overlapped the other, so the rain did not come in. Fences were made of willows bent into shape; sometimes there were spikes along the top, so that children would not be able to climb over, and to discourage young men from visiting late at night.

The parents had a bed, but the children slept on long benches or on straw on the floor. The windows were very small, with taut sheep skin as a window covering. Of course, people lived from dawn to dusk, with very little light during dark evenings. Women worked inside the house, and men tilled the fields. Unmarried girls would occupy their time by learning handiwork and weaving, and making carpets and clothes for their dowries. The custom in Maramureş was that when a girl was of marriageable age the family would place a wooden tree-like structure in the front yard, and place cups and pitchers upside down on its bare branches. We saw several of these trees in front yards – now they are just decorative.

That evening we arrived at Pensiunea Teleptan, a small inn in Vadu Izei; this type of accommodation has become quite popular lately. It is smaller than a hotel but with most of the same amenities – except this one did not have air-conditioning. We were treated to the customary greetings of salt and bread, and *țuică*. (*țuică* is the generic term for an alcoholic beverage distilled from fruit; *pălincă* and *horincă* are double-distilled: and we tried them all at some point or another.) We had an excellent meal, followed by entertainment: musicians and dancers in local costumes.



Marriage Tree, or merely some local colour?



Tallest wooden church in the world.

We later joined them in the circle. After a German-style breakfast the next morning we visited a local distillery to sample more *țuică*s. Nearby was a stream with a water wheel with an intricate system of sluices whereby the water spilled into a huge basin quite forcefully, causing a whirlpool in the basin. The neighbouring people would bring their carpets, blankets and other large items to be washed here.

Our next stop was the Peri-Săpânța Monastery, at 75 metres the tallest wooden church in the world. The grounds were well-cared for, but the

entire area seemed abandoned except for tourists. Some nuns lived nearby and they look after the premises. One could climb to one of the landings to enjoy the view but the most interesting spot was the basement, where some local people were gathering for a service. Then on to the Merry Cemetery and adjoining church, where, over the past 80 years, people have had 800 carved wooden crosses painted in Săpânța blue, with witty and humorous epitaphs summing up the lives of the deceased. An apprentice of the original founder, Stanion Patras, carries on this work.



Monuments in the Merry Cemetery.

Several of us went to the Museum of Communism in Sighet, formerly the prison that held the political prisoners during Ceausescu's time. It was informative and well-laid out, but very depressing and upsetting. Elie Wiesel was born and raised in this town, and there is a small Memorial House devoted to him and his life; he was the only member of

his family that survived Auschwitz. That evening, during supper, dancers from Neluțu's group performed for us and later we joined them in the gazebo in the back yard for dancing.

On the way back to Cluj the next day we stopped at the Bârsana Monastery (Romanian Orthodox) in Maramureș county: it is one of eight wooden churches in this area designated as a UNESCO heritage site. They all



Bârsana Monastery.

have very tall steeples, and this monastery has been a destination of many pilgrims; it was built by a monk in 1720 to thank God for sparing people from the plague. Today was Pentecost Sunday and many people were walking throughout the grounds dressed for the most part in national costume. There was constant singing projected over loudspeakers – a cappella. Prayers also were spoken throughout this outdoor service and people were frequently crossing themselves in response to what was being said.

The next day we had our second dance class in the morning (we had five in total) with Sonia and Cristian teaching a session, followed by one with Camelia and Neluțu. The Doina and the Tradiții Folk Ensembles (taught by Camelia and Neluțu) performed for us that evening, dancing to live music. The adults were highly proficient, and the teens and children were very well trained and confident with their dances. We were then invited to dance with them – mainly the Ciardaș; and we enjoyed taking part.

Our bus took us to Frata village in the Transylvanian plains the next day but on the way there we stopped at Berkeshu, which has the oldest church in this area, made of wood. It was built in 1747 and brought to this location from Bistrica in 1765. It is very small with paintings on fabric on the walls; however, they were very dark because of the soot from fires used to heat the church in the past. One icon was 100 years old and there was one painted on glass. The resident priest was very proud of this church and gave us a great deal of information. The church consisted of two rooms with the men in the room at the front near the iconostasis, the women at the back. Services are still held here on festival days. Orthodox priests must be married and his wife was present. He asked us to sing a song and we sang *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* – very appropriate and almost haunting. We then had some demonstrations by the villagers: shucking corn, cutting grass with a scythe, hoeing around corn plants. Everything is done with manual labour, and we were invited to try our hand at these tasks – some did, with varying success. The new church was right next door – built in 2008, with beautiful frescoes throughout. The iconostasis was made of linden wood. A group of about six children sang for us led



Frata Traditional Folk Dance Ensemble.

by the priest's wife, followed by the priest who sang a hymn. He then put a small cross of rosewater on each of our foreheads and the backs of our hand. In the past people would wear their national costume to services, but this is not done so much anymore. On our way out of the church women were waiting at the door to offer us sweet baked goods. We drove to the community hall, where we were again greeted by women and children dressed in national costume, holding plates of salt and bread and more baked goods and drinks. Musicians were playing and a group of young boys entertained us with their dancing, slapping and clapping routines; they danced with confidence and panache. Next door was the local school for students from grades one to eight, and we were given a tour. One room was a museum with a loom, lots of traditional handiwork, other artifacts and pottery that had been done by previous students as extra-curricular activities. In this area, students stand up when the teacher enters the room and when they answer a question. After grade eight students must go to a boarding school in a nearby city. We had a sumptuous supper after which there was a show performed by the Frata Traditional Folk Dance Ensemble, accompanied by live music of the Soporul de Campie Band. A famous violinist, Ciurcui Alexandru performed with the musicians. It was a treat to see these dancers, and we were invited to join them after their performance. I enjoyed watching the children dance and interact with each other.

Our next adventure took us to the Turda Salt Mine. It is dated from 1075 and rock salt was mined here from the seventeenth century until 1932. It is now a museum with long tunnels from which saline solution still drips, and with mining machinery still very much intact. It was very good quality salt, and used by royalty in Europe. In 1881 a wooden extraction machine was built and it was pulled by horses which would eventually go blind because of the salt in the air. The salt bags were made of buffalo hide, and the wood used in all the structures and machinery was from fir trees: it would absorb the salt and as a result would become stronger. About three billion tons of salt were extracted from this mine. During World War II it was used as an air-raid shelter and later as a cheese warehouse. The temperature is a constant 12 degrees Celsius, and the salt air is good for the immune system and allergies; there is also a spa underground. In 2010 it was decided that this would become a museum, but with a difference: at the very base of the mine, 400 feet down, there is now a midway, with a gift shop, a Ferris wheel, a mini golf course, ping pong tables, a sport field, an amphitheatre, a bowling alley and even a pond where one can rent rowboats. There are seven other salt mines in Romania, thus this area must once have been a seabed – about 13 million years ago. Lunch was at an interesting medieval style restaurant which had a replica of Dracula's castle with Vlad looking down on visitors. That evening we enjoyed a Klezmer concert by the Mazel Tov Orchestra, after which we had some dancing.



Outskirts of Mărișel village in the Apuseni Mountains.

We had a wonderful surprise during our second-to-last day in Romania: we were taken to Mărișel village in the Apuseni Mountains. Our bus dropped us off at the outskirts of the village, and several horses and wagons were waiting to take us the rest of the way: about seven to a wagon. As we rode along the country roads, other horses out in the fields came neighing and running to meet our team of horses, who were also neighing greetings. We were told later that there were probably mares in heat in the fields who were looking for a mate. As we arrived at our destination, we were greeted by a live band playing for us, also people in ethnic costumes offering the usual salt and bread, and with tables laid out with *palinca*, and other appetizers. The view from the inn was spectacular, with lush meadows, and mist rising up out of the valleys. After we had a bite to eat, we were again entertained by some men scything, including the mayor of the town, dressed in his suit. There were women demonstrating carding of wool and spinning thread. Our dinner was goulash, polenta and beer, and dessert was small cakes and pastries. During and after the supper, the band kept playing and a group of men and women sang some songs for us. Afterwards we did some dancing with some of the local people, and we could go and visit with and feed our horses. A bonfire was lit nearby, and we went to dance around it. At the end of the evening, the band accompanied us back to our bus, which was waiting just around the corner

We had now come to our last day together, and in the morning we had our final dance review session. My roommate Sue, who is a potter, and I went to visit a potter and ceramicist, Doina Stici, in her studio; Sue

That evening we had a sumptuous dinner and afterwards a band played music for dancing, mainly in the Inverțița style, with some recorded music during band breaks. Many other dancers who were in Camelia and Neluțu's classes came to enjoy the evening as well.

And so our trip was at an end. It was varied, well-organized and interesting. One plus was that we remained in one hotel for the duration except for two nights in the Pensiuine. The dancing was not as important during this tour as was the cultural aspect of the region but we were introduced to the very challenging couple dances done in this area. We also were able to buy custom-made shoes at a reasonable price, also costumes and ethnic jewelry. It was a treat to see many people wearing national costumes, either to greet us, or just in the street. We were made to feel very welcome and special at all the venues that were arranged for us. And Sonia and Cristian kept us entertained and smiling.



Greek Dancing on Kea With Vaggelis Dimoudis

August 2019

by Murray Forbes

Kea is a little Greek island off the coast of Attica that distinguishes itself from most Greek islands by virtue of being accessible only from the commercial port of Lavrio as opposed to Pireus from where most of the islands are accessed. In addition, the ferries from Lavrio do not do the circuit of popular islands. The result is that, although hugely popular as a tourist destination, the tourists come in droves from Athens and so the island is thoroughly Greek.

Now it is possible to get to Athens from our mountain village in southern Spain by following the GR7 (long distance hiking route) that traverses the Sierra Nevada mountains above our house on its way from Tarifa to Athens. I don't know anyone who has done this and, let's face it, by the time one got there one's feet would be so mutilated that it would be quite impossible to dance. Of course there is also a three and a half hour direct flight from Malaga airport, some two hours drive from us. I however, like the Buddha, chose the middle way. I pride myself on thinking out of the skull.

Europe being so small, anything going north seemed to me to be a good bet. Thus using a series of airlines that I had never heard of, whose main merit was being cheap, we would make our way up to magnificent Riga in Latvia near the Baltic Sea. From there the idea was to progress to Kaliningrad, Russia's access to the Baltic, then on to St. Petersburg and finally an overnight hop to Athens.

It all sounded perfectly logical as I sewed together a succession of the cheapest, and therefore most



Photo: Murray Forbes.

*Lavinia Forbes at the magnificent beach off the UNESCO protected Curonian spit near Kaliningrad, Russia, "where we tried to eat at the only restaurant in the area without much success." **

inflexible, flights. It was at this juncture that a Russian friend in our village pointed out that in order to get a Russian visa one needed the patience of Job and a large amount of creativity. *

Now Greece is a totally different universe. In spite of the economic issues, people seem happy and full of enthusiasm for the process of living. There are local buses that leave from the airport to various places including Lavrio, but no one seemed to know when ours would leave. The board in the airport with bus departures posted was the work of extreme fiction. A bus driver told us, while we tried to get on the wrong bus, when ours was scheduled to arrive, a long comatose sit in the sun from when we arrived. Once on the bus we jogged along visiting various villages until evicted summarily at Markopoulo where we were told that another bus would come shortly, which indeed it did. In Lavrio we had not bought ferry tickets so we dragged our luggage the kilometer from the bus stop to the port against a horrendous wind. Luckily we were in time for the last ferry but as this did not leave until 4:00 p.m. we were able to return to the town for a very pleasant and leisurely lunch. No problem with the luggage. We could leave it in the ticket office.

Vaggelis had arranged for the group to stay in a charming little hotel across the road from Coressia beach, the far side of the bay from the ferry port. Arriving a day before the rest of the group, we got talking to the friendly proprietors, a retired doctor and his wife. As far as I could tell, the retired doctor spent his days drinking coffee and guzzling pills and his wife ran the hotel single-handed. One does not starve in Greece and it was an extreme challenge to do justice to the delicious array of food produced for our breakfast.



Photo: Lavinia Forbes.

Murray walking towards the ferry dock in Corresia, Kea on the stretch that closed down at night and where they danced in the evenings.

The dance classes took place on their terrace. The group was Spanish from the north of Spain and I wistfully thought that the ten day workshop would be my great leap forward with learning the language. However, some French dancers, whom we had met in Ikaria many many years ago – a chief of police and his very well-dressed wife – turned up with their car along with a bunch of their friends and we were adopted by the French. In fact many of the Spanish spoke Greek, in which the workshop was conducted, and amongst themselves they spoke Euskara (Basque) and Catalan so not much Castellano was spoken in any event.

In total there were four teachers. We learnt some island dances from Cypress and some convoluted couple dances from Kea. There were also some Macedonian and Thracian dances. The teachers came with their families and many dancers and friends came over from Athens to join them as August is holiday season in Europe.

We attended two *panagiris* (sort of religious-based parties) but being so close to Athens they were not typical local events. The bus drive up to the village where they took place was positively terrifying not least because of the overwhelming number of vehicles parked everywhere. On one of the occasions we had a police escort which added to the chaos. One of the events was in a gigantic open air restaurant, but the excellent live music was amplified to the point that it was deafening, even with makeshift earplugs, and there was almost no space to dance in. The other was so crowded that we bailed out and found a restaurant nearby which had run out of food so it was not our most successful evening.

Being adopted by our French friends not only got us involved in the daily French ritual of aperitif but also trips to the various beaches around the island. It is very hot in Greece in August but at least on the island it didn't soar much above 30 C. We had two hours of dance classes in the morning and two in the evening, leaving the afternoons free for relaxing. Later in the evening we would go into the village to a restaurant where our teachers and their friends played traditional instruments and sang and we were able to dance on the road that they close off after the last ferry unloads. There was one outing in which we went to the charming village of Loulis, from where we were able to walk to a stone sculpture of a lion carved about two and a half thousand years ago. Unfortunately, the museum was shut. We also visited a beach and then drove down the spine of the island to a monastery the other end of it. It was a nice outing and extremely animated as Greeks and Spaniards in general know how to enjoy themselves.

For our return to Spain, we had rented an apartment in Athens away from the tourist area with the intention of visiting some friends who live in the area. It was an inspired choice with a live market around the corner and lots of shops and restaurants nearby. Everything seemed to go right for us. Our French friends piled our luggage into their car so we

did not have to drag it anywhere. In Lavrio, the bus that was taking the main group from the port to their hotel in the center of Athens happened to be passing within a five minute walk of our apartment and agreed to take us and let us off there. The apartment owner spoke excellent English and had no problem with us staying on until our late night flight. As he was taking his grand- daughter to the airport at about the same time he gave us a lift as well.

Payback time, however, occurred when we got to Malaga airport at 2:00 a.m. to find no one at the car park where we had left our car. Later, a van drove up with passengers picking up their cars who, of course, took priority. We discovered why when it emerged that the guy who checked us in had assumed that we meant 2:00 p.m. To their credit they were most apologetic, which is not something that comes easily to the Andaluz, but we then had some quality time waiting for him to find our car and then wash it. As we live about two hours drive away from the airport it was a long day.

* To read about the adventures procuring visas and visiting Russia go to the OFDA website [Articles page](#) where the full article is posted.

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Penny Brichta - Israeli
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Vlasto Petkovski - Macedonian
Musicians: **Barbara Pixton,**
Tom Pixton & Julia Poirier
Plus Scottish Country Dance
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OFDA's First Nations Dance Café

November 23, 2019

by Sheryl Demetro



Photo: Allen Katz.

Cotee Harper demonstrating the Fancy Shawl Dance.

Our first café held at Willowdale Presbyterian Church in North York was bustling with activity and chatter. There was lots of space to enjoy a delicious pot luck supper without having to remove some of the tables to make room for dancing later in the evening. And...there was lots of parking adjacent to the church, a convenience that everyone really appreciated.



Photo: Bev Sidney.

Our guest teacher was Cotee Harper. She is from the Cree Shawnee Potawatomi Nation and was born and raised in Toronto. Her partner, Jonas McGregor, who accompanied Cotee on his hand drum and with singing, is Ojibway. Not only were we pleased to have Cotee and Jonas, but we also had the pleasure of admiring their charming, very young daughter and meeting Cotee's mother, who later kindly answered questions from some of the dancers – a family affair.

Cotee has been immersed in the arts from a young age – from over two decades studying classical ballet and jazz to First Nations traditional fancy shawl and jingle dress dancing. Cotee explained some of the origins and meanings of the dance

styles. Tradition is her guide as she respectfully incorporates ancestral teachings into her more contemporary work.

Her first dance was a fancy shawl dance accompanied by Jonas. Wrapped in a beautifully decorated shawl, her movements represented a butterfly as it flitted gracefully from flower to flower. Her soft white leather moccasins rendered her graceful footsteps silent. Then we formed a circle as Cotee taught us some simple footwork and we danced with her to Jonas' drum.

She showed us her intriguing jingle or healing dress. There are 365 bells (representing days of the year) sewn on the skirt in several rows around the dress. Shells were originally used but now bells adorn the dresses. The bells are conical in shape and in the past were made from the lids of tobacco tins. The narrow end of the bell is attached to the dress so that the wider end is free to jingle with the adjacent bells when the wearer is dancing.

The eagle is very sacred to First Nations. Since the eagle flies at the highest heights of any bird, it flies closest to the Creator. Cotee had a head piece made from the very soft eagle under feathers and also had darker feathers in a fan-like shape to carry in her hand.



Photo: Bev Sidney.

Jingle/Healing Dress.



Photo: Allen Katz.

With regard to how men's dancing style differs from the women's, she told us that men's footwork is faster and they use different steps in their storytelling.

Cotee was gracious in explaining traditions and dances and answering our questions. The First Nations Cafe was a perfect theme for our last café of 2019.

Thank you, Cotee.
Hiy Hiy Meegwetch.



The Grapevine

Frank Morrison died recently. He taught a folk dance course at the YM/YWCA in Toronto in 1965 and this is where Heidi Fiebig and Helga Hyde were introduced to folk dancing and got hooked. Although Frank did not have regular classes, he did dance at the University Settlement House and also did some teaching in Ernie Krehm's classes. With his encouragement, Heidi and Helga also started dancing at the Settlement House.

Mr. Shan has closed his business and so, after 30 years, there is no ad for Shan Shoes in this magazine. We wish him a happy retirement.

Walter Zagorski and Chris Linge Macdonald will be back on the boards in March with the North Toronto Players at The Papermill Theatre. They will be performing *The Millionaire*, a musical murder mystery. For tickets visit www.northtorontoplayers.com.

Rachel Gottesman was part of the chorus for *Les Contes d'Hoffman* presented by the Toronto City Opera in November. Look for her in its next production, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, at the Fleck Theatre in May. Get more information at www.torontocityopera.com/. Meanwhile, one can't dance with a broken toe and so Rachel had to forego the OFDA New Year's Eve party and, no doubt, a few more classes.

Murray Forbes wrote that he and Lavinia "spent the New Year's Eve Greek dancing with Kyriakos Moisidis in Bad Herrenalb, a pretty spa town in the Black Forest of Germany. There were about 70 of us. They brought in four excellent musicians from Greece and a Pontic Dance group performed for us on one of the evenings. Kyriakos is a very good teacher, even when trying to do so in German."

Petroff Gallery, 1016 Eglinton Avenue West, will include works by mixed media artist, Helen Wehrstein, for the month of February.

With Carl Toushan having reached the age of 92 years (see articles on p.6 and p.9) and still enthusiastically dancing, the OFDA Executive has honoured him with a Life Membership in appreciation for his long time support as an active participant as well as his annual donations to the association.



Photo: Rick Adamezyk.

Late night dancers at the Hamilton Birthday Party for Olga Sandolowich and Carl Toushan. See p.6.