

## *Eye on Dance by Eileen!*

### **Kolo Festival 2016, the 65th year!**

Kolo Festival has reached retirement age, as have many of the people attending. You wouldn't know it from observing the energy of our amazing community of folk dancers, including Kolo Festival's indefatigable nonagenarian founder, John Filcich. I'm happy to report that the Festival was as vigorous as ever.

The Festival was again held in the familiar Croatian American Culture Center and had two excellent and accomplished teachers, Yannis Konstantinou from Macedonia, and Michael Ginsberg from New York. Their teaching couldn't have been more different, but they are both charming, energetic, extremely knowledgeable, and have an obvious love of dancing. Dancing was the emphasis, but music (where would the dancing be without it?), singing, and performances all rounded out the two days to achieve a perfect balance.

Yannis reviewed a few favorite dances that he taught last year, like Sofka, and taught some delicious new ones. I appreciate small tidbits during teaching sessions, such as when Yannis told us that many of us would be pulled out of the line in the village because our feet were scraping the ground and that meant we would be kicking up too much dust! He explained that people in the villages don't only dance for fun, but for a sense of family and community. When leading a dance, he would have the people most important to him dancing next to him in line.

Yannis' footwork was so amazing to watch, showing what can happen if you grew up in Macedonia and started dancing at an early age. There was no dust under Yannis's feet. I do wish we had more of the basics cemented in our brains before trying all those embellishments. It's my goal to constantly improve on improvisations, and if I can pick up a couple of new moves, I feel I'm growing my dance vocabulary. Thank you, Yannis.

Michael made up for his lack of being "ethnic" with excellent teaching skills and by introducing a wide range of dances. He broke down the patterns so well, and he made you remember some dances without relying on him. He taught a mix of very lively complicated dances with a few easy village ones, sometimes accompanying our dancing with his trumpet. He also had interesting tidbits, like the fact that Bulgarians now want to connect with their dancing roots, but don't know their village's dances, so they learn dances from Youtube! Now they are all doing the same dances in the same way. Welcome to recreational folk dancing.

After lunch (deliciously served by Hristo), you could choose kolos or culture corner. The kolos were taught by the two Johns, Morovich and Filcich. John Morovich has a wealth of knowledge of Croatian dances and is also a musician, often playing his tambura while teaching. He's a truly multi-talented person, who also taught the singing class and led the tamburica band in the evening. Maria Bebelekova and Michele Simon also taught singing. John Filcich is still teaching kolos. He imparts his traditions and styling effortlessly. And I challenge anyone half his age to match the bounce in his step! He was telling me how he had (metaphorically) died and gone to heaven a few weeks ago: he was at a weekend waltz and polka festival. Go get 'em, John, my favorite waltz partner.



The crowd at night during Kolo Festival – *Photo by J. Croco*

Michael gave an amusing culture talk on Saturday. He talked about how his parents schlepped him at an early age to international couples dancing classes. He said the first Balkan dance that made a big splash was èaèak. One day he realized when thinking about a dance he was trying to learn, that he had a better way to explain it than his teacher. He was only 15. Soon after, he started teaching. He also started playing the trumpet, but only because he had braces and couldn't play the clarinet because it would have pushed out on his teeth! He hilariously related the story of his brass band, Zlatne Uste, being invited to the famous Guca competition in 1987.

For some people, when the afternoon classes ended around 5:00 pm, the day was over, but for the live music enthusiasts, it was just starting at 6:30 when the bands rolled out and the party began. I was glad to see healthy crowds both nights. Mark Angel did a fantastic job of putting live video feeds on the Kolo Festival's Facebook page. It's so hard to describe to non-dancing friends and relatives what it's like to be in a line of a 100-plus dancers snaking around a band. This year those non-dancers were able to get a small taste of the experience.

There were many memorable moments to savor. Michael and Yannis each led several dances in the evenings. Both evenings, the gajda players and other musicians played a touching set to the esteemed and much-missed Vassil Bebelekov. We were also treated to two performances from the Radost dance group from Seattle. I was talking to one of their younger members, asking how he got into folk dancing, when I discovered that he was the nephew of Asha Goldberg. It was my turn to mist up. For those of you who remember Asha, you will know how I felt.

The Festival committee did a wonderful job. The attention to detail was superb, from the coffee and tea table, snacks, a board listing all the dances taught and when, having people available to walk you to your car at night, to the seamless transition of bands. Ivan Velev did a great job as Kafanameister. Big thanks to Bill Cope and

Kaela Fine and all the other organizers and volunteers.

Next year Michael Ginsburg will be back. He emphasized how important our Kolo Festival is for Balkan dance, and what an extremely high level of musicians and dancers we have in the Bay Area. He said it was an honor to be chosen to teach and to be asked back. I remember Yves Moreau saying the same thing the last time he was at Kolo Festival – and Yves Moreau will be back next year too! Hope to see you all there!



Yannis Konstantinou teaching at Kolo Festival. – *Photo by J. Croco*