

KOLO FESTIVAL – Take One

by Memo Keswick

The 2018 California Kolo Festival was an event full of wonder and memories to cherish. Started in 1952 by Ivan Petar “John” Filcich, it remains vibrant today thanks to a dedicated Festival Board headed by Bill Cope. They deserve everyone’s heartfelt thanks and much appreciation. The same goes for all the other volunteers and all the dancers who attended!

The main festival teachers, Sonia Dion and Cristian Florescu, Gergana Panova, John Morovich, Maria Bebelekova, Michele Simon, and John Filcich, did a fantastic job bringing world dance and music to our feet and many smiles to our faces. Festival attendees had to constantly choose what to experience, knowing something else equally enticing was occurring in another space!

This year, the importance of community was highlighted. We loved seeing how well the organizers wove in that we are a worldwide assembly of dancers and musicians. Dancers came from all parts of California, from other states, and other countries, including Canada and Germany.

Cristian and Sonia led dances to the fabulous Romanian band Trio Dulce Amar. Ah, to have been able to understand the Romanian dance shouts! There were both dance club dances (2-3 minutes) as well as ethnic celebrations (10-15 minutes).

John Morovich held singing workshops, and then directed a Ladarke performance (a vocal arrangement based on Emil Cossetto’s 1957 score as taught by former Lado Ensemble member Nena Sokcic) which brought new and past performers together. Michele Simon taught Balkan singing and played in different musical groups. Maria Bebelekova not only taught Bulgarian singing but she, Gergana Panova, and other Bulgarians led a Rhodopes dance set. Additional examples of community were seen in the Facebook publicity, the Balkan dinner and drinks available, the festival volunteers from many different dance communities, the wonderful decorations, costumes, dance and singing instruction, the Culture Corner lectures, and Toni Denmark’s dance-related artwork for sale. Different musician configurations were also seen – from trios to large ensembles, local versus out-of-town musicians, impromptu jam sessions, etc.

During “Giving Tuesday” in the week following the Kolo Festival, we were reminded that special

appreciation could be shown by sending in an additional monetary donation to support this annual event.

KOLO FESTIVAL – Take Two

by Kevin Greek (on his first year at Kolo!)

I first heard about the annual Kolo Festival in 1990, when I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area. My folk dance friends loved to share their experiences at Kolo. As each year passed, I learned dances retaught from Kolo, saw its ads, read about it in *Let’s Dance!*, found and was intrigued by its dance notes, and was asked several times by friends if I planned to or had attended. Each year, however, I’ve always returned to Portland, Oregon, to spend Thanksgiving weekend with family. Kolo Festival would never change to a date other than the Thanksgiving weekend, so it was an event I thought I would never experience.

This past summer, my beloved father passed away, my stepmother having preceded him by 15 years. Now my siblings generally celebrate the holidays by themselves, so the traditional family Thanksgiving dinner was not planned. Although my siblings still love a visit from me, I felt this year it was time for a change. This year I stayed in the Bay Area and registered for my very first Kolo Festival.

Despite all I had learned about Kolo Festival over the years, I was not prepared to be overwhelmed. The program went from 9 am to midnight, with dance and singing workshops, and an evening dance party with multiple bands. This year’s Festival featured Sonia Dion and Cristian Florescu, and Gergana Panova, the most cordial and charming master dance instructors I’ve ever

met. What a wonderful experience it is learning from them and dancing beside them!

In the evening there were remarkable parties with live music by Romanian band Trio Dulce Amar and dances lead by

Cristian; later the Bulgarian band Veselyatsi played, with Gergana leading dances in a packed room. They were dancing in their element. as 60 or more folk dancers following in line witnessed.

I wrote an article praising Gergana in the September 2016 issue of *Let’s Dance!*, about her bursts of noisy dance at the podium occasionally punctuating her Stockton Folk Dance Camp lecture, thereby rousing all eyes from their post-lunch Culture Corner nap.

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If you are not a social person and prefer to spend hours on your smartphone texting or playing Candy Crush, I would not recommend the Kolo Festival (I would recommend therapy). – Kevin Greek

KOLO FESTIVAL – Take Two *(continued)*

At Kolo, she lectured on the remarkable history and development of her Bulgarian folk dance professional studies and career. The Kafana was full to capacity listening to her; no dancing at the podium, but nobody napped either.

John Filcich, the beloved founder of the Kolo Festival, returns each year. At 94, he still thrives, finding younger women to dance with, occasionally planting a kiss on a cheek. John's presence each year, teaching kolos, selling media and gifts, and sharing history, adds to the legacy of Kolo.



Catered meals were a plus.

Once lunch was announced, a long line immediately formed to the bathrooms. Curious, I investigated and found out what everyone already knew: the line to the lunch service wound in from the short corridor to the restrooms, around the bend and out to the dance hall. Top-notch meals were prepared for participants on-site by Chef Hristo Kolev. The Festival easily has the best food of any local dance festival. Tables and chairs were set out in the Kafana for diner comfort and social time.

There were so many other praises for Kolo conveniences this year: a safety escort for patrons leaving the venue in the evening; an excellent, free, full-color program; a schedule posted on the wall; volunteers anticipating your needs; and more. Bravo to the entire Kolo Festival board, volunteers, bands, and instructors for making it so enjoyable.

If you are not a social person and prefer to spend hours on your smartphone texting or playing Candy Crush, I would not recommend the Kolo Festival (I would recommend therapy). However, after some appropriate treatment, the Kolo Festival should be prescribed for exposure to quality music, dance, song, friends, excitement, and joy. If one never wanted to dance before, then an evening of infectious music at Kolo would perform miracles!



John Filcich continues to teach and lead dancing at age 94.



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