

# First Annual Lyrids Festival

By David Carman

When Laura and I first moved to Washington a couple of years ago, we knew that there would be good dancing here (a prerequisite), but that there would not be the festivals that we had become used to while living in California. And although Folklife is much anticipated, we missed being able to go to a weekend festival to learn new dances from master teachers. The intellectual stimulation of learning new dances, often from regions of the world with which we were unfamiliar, the joys of a couple of days of non-stop dancing, often to live music, plus the additional benefits of meeting new people, and reconnecting with acquaintances not seen in a while, was the highlight of our dance year.

We were told by a number of people that right across the border, in B.C., was one of the best festivals around, at Salt Spring Island. So last spring we made the two-ferry trek to see Yves and France Moreau teaching non-Bulgarian dances, and Iliana Bozhenova, accompanied by Todor Yankov on accordion, teaching Bulgarian. It was a great weekend, with unique accommodations to being on a sparsely inhabited island. Since there weren't any nearby restaurants that could accommodate 100 dancers, lunches and Saturday dinner were included with your fee. Additionally, many dancers were billeted with locals, as lodging was at a premium. It was a fantastic weekend, with great dancing and wonderful camaraderie.

Alas, last year was the final festival for Salt Spring Island, partly due to the fact that most of the work associated with the organization and running of the festival was done by one person, Rosemarie Keough. After ten years, she had reached a point where it had all become too much, and growing obligations in other areas had brought her to the decision to pass the festival along to other, more willing, hands.

And that would be the dance group in Burnaby, B.C., a suburb in the greater Vancouver area. The festival was renamed Lyrids, after the meteor shower prominent at this time of year, and a committee of hard workers took on the task of making this new festival as successful as Salt Spring Island.

It is always a pleasure to go to any sort of event where everything works seamlessly. It is a tribute to the

committee's hard work and organization skills that everything flowed so well throughout the weekend. There were two teachers this year: Ahmet Lüleci, teaching dances from Turkey, and Bata Marčetić, teaching dances from Serbia. While Ahmet is well known locally, having been through the area at the Veselo Folk Dance Festival earlier this year, Bata is a new face for most dancers in the area. Both men having danced with national companies in their native countries, they brought an expertise and knowledge of styling that ensured that the material they presented was, although choreographed, ethnically correct.

There was plenty of opportunity to learn. There was an introductory session for both teachers on Friday night, two sessions on Saturday, and two on Sunday. Each taught about ten dances over the weekend, with some time at each session dedicated to review. Hopefully, that will ensure that a few of each will make it back to local clubs.

But the weekend wasn't only about learning new dances. There was a dance party on Friday night to recorded music. You could start off your Saturday morning before the teaching session with more dances, as well as Saturday noon, and Sunday morning. For those of us who love live music, Kafana Republik did an outstanding job of playing for the dance party Saturday night. There were also dance performances (Serbian and Turkish), as well as vocal groups. Whew!! If it all became too much, you could wander out of the hall and peruse the items for sale by the vendors.

And speaking of the hall, this one was great. The Shriners' hall in Burnaby was the right size, had a great floor, plenty of parking, and kitchen facilities. This last was important because even though the festival was no longer on Salt Spring Island, the feeding-of-the-community idea was brought over intact, along with the option of being billeted if you were from out-of-town. And the food was great.

Apparently, as we have grown older, we have become more discriminating about the food we eat. They made every effort to accommodate any dietary restriction, and largely succeeded in providing wholesome, tasty meals. Tables were set up (with table "cloths" no less), meals served, and tables broken back down and put away with amazing efficiency. During the rest of the festival, the groaning tables were full with a bewildering array of snacks, if one was feeling peckish.



Group photo at the Lyrids Festival. Photo by Bruce Sharpe.