

LYRIDS FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Bev Neilsen, on behalf of the Lyrids Committee

As I came to the task of summarizing the Lyrids Folk Dance Festivals, I asked Burnaby Folk Dance members of the committee to contribute by saying why one festival was their favourite, but instead I got reams of memories, no particular favorites: they were all special. The contributions are woven into the article, attesting to the strong network of friends that the committee created.—Bev Neilson

Over twelve vibrant years, Lyrids has blossomed into a beloved springtime tradition in British Columbia, drawing dancers from across North America to celebrate the rich tapestry of international folk dance.

We sincerely thank Rosemarie Keough, who created and organized the Salt Spring Island Festival for 10 years (2004–2013), for sharing her passion of folk dancing and passing the baton to Burnaby International Folk Dancers to continue her legacy.

Over the past eleven festivals (2014–2025), we've had the privilege of learning dances from around the world with esteemed instructors: George & Irina Arabagi (Ukraine & Moldova), Robert Bagnoli (Balkan), Tom Bozogian & Sheree King (Armenia), Alexandru David (Romania), Cristian Florescu & Sonia Dion (Romania), Željko Jergan (Croatia), Genci Kastrati (Albania), Dimitrois Kontogiannis (Greek), Steve Kotansky (Balkan), Jaap Leegwater (Bulgaria), Ahmet Lüleci (Turkey), Bata Marčetić (Serbia), Yves Moreau (Bulgaria) & France Bourque-Moreau (international), Mea Nordenfelt (Albania), Lee Otterholt (Greek & international), Gergana Panova (Bulgaria), Naomi Taussig (Israel), Tineke and Maurits van Geel (Armenia, Roma, and international), and Steve Weintraub (seated dances).

To reach out to the local community with our dancing, we organized some schools to engage our world-class teachers in their setting. It was wonderful to see how folk dancing energized the school-aged kids, and how masterful our teachers were with all ages!

Because of COVID, Lyrids 2020, where Tineke and Maurits van Geel were to be our featured teachers, was cancelled. We successfully hosted online festivals in 2021 (co-organized with Kyklos International Folk Dancers) and again in 2022. Thanks to Dale Adamson and Cricket Raybern for their technical expertise. For the online festivals, we asked everyone to share their ethnic recipes, and we created a digital Lyrids Folk Dance Festival cookbook. See it at lyridsfolkdancefestival.org/cookbook.

Also, some of our creative and artistic committee members designed and made stars that people could order and make at home to put up in their dance room for the festival to celebrate the Lyrid meteor shower that occurs in April, after which we are named. Some Zoom hosts still feature these stars. lyridsfolkdancefestival.org/decorations.

Getting Started

The idea for Lyrids came easily. Carrying it out was a memorable group effort. We had all been to the Salt Spring Folk Dance Festival. Dale Adamson had the experience of attending many festivals in the U.S. The Burnaby International Folk Dance Club, and Dale, who was a member of both Burnaby and Surrey clubs, and had a clear sense of mission, came together. Gradually, we planned our first festival. After much discussion, we named our festival “Lyrids” after the Lyrid meteor shower that occurs in April. Paul Tong and Siu-ching Lui, with their experience at many festivals, helped us come to the name. Siu-ching was an editor on the dance notes for many years. In terms of folk dancing, “Lyrids” held no meaning, so we endeavored over the years to imbue it with our brand. Burnaby International Folk Dancers took it on as a project and funded the first festival.

First, finding the venue: a group went out and toured many sites, measured the dance spaces and checked out location, ambience, the floor's shock absorption, and how the hall would handle meals. Luckily, we found an ideal venue right in Burnaby, and this stood us in good stead for a few years until it closed. It had a required caterer, so we had to negotiate with them to accommodate many diets and to serve appropriate food in a manner that put dancing first. We had a liquor license for the first two years, following in Salt Spring's footsteps, but phased that out.

We decided whom to invite for our first teachers; luckily, both Ahmet Lüleci and Miroslav “Bata” Marčetić were available and were honored to be invited to our first festival, just as the wonderful band from the Seattle area, Orkestar RTW, was for our Saturday evening party.

We met constantly, discussed every item, reviewed progress, became a high-functioning committee, and forged what will be lifelong friendships.

Year Two built on the hard-won progress of the first year, then the third year came, and we were flying...

“When I participate in the festival, I feel like I’m embracing and immersing in that country for the weekend with the teachers, the catered food, the band, the participants, the performances, the festival shop that people can browse and purchase [from] during the festival, and the many other activities, such as singing and drumming workshops we have had in the past.”—Chrisanne Pennimpede

Behind the Scenes

Thanks to the work of Singular Productions, each festival (through 2019) has been lovingly preserved on DVD, capturing not just the steps but also the styling, nuances, and spirit of the dances. These recordings are more than souvenirs—they are living archives of a community's shared passion.

We want to give special recognition to Dale Adamson and all she has done for the Lyrids Folk Dance Festival: Creating, updating, and maintaining the Lyrids Folk Dance Festival website, creating an archive of festival DVDs, creating the registration form and system of sorting data, arranging

technical requirements of the festival, such as the music and microphones, setting up music playlists, hosting many of the teachers, creating the poster and flyers, taking on many behind-the-scenes tasks, and having an after-festival party at her house, with many of the teachers attending, making the festival last a little longer so we can socialize and dance a little more, if our dancing feet will let us. Thanks, Dale! Bruce Sharpe, Dale's partner, has been a kingpin with his computer and sound equipment every year! Just hauling the equipment to the site is a gigantic job, let alone setting it up and keeping it running smoothly. Thanks, Dale and Bruce!

Even during the pandemic years, when the festival pivoted online in 2021 and 2022, the spirit of Lyrids endured. Zoom screens lit up with smiling faces, living rooms transformed into dance spaces, and the music of Orkestar Unbound and Osem i Devet + Friends kept our feet moving and hearts connected.—Dale Adamson

The Lyrids Festival Experience

The participants bring so much energy to the festival with their eagerness to learn dances and willingness to help where they are needed. We become a community, helping each other and wanting everyone to have a wonderful experience.

Setting up the hall starts as soon as the venue is available on Friday, making it *our* space. Where venue rules allow it, banners from many clubs are hung.

Arrival and check-in starts on Friday afternoon. It's wonderful to see friends from previous festivals meeting their dance buddies again. Some participants are billeted at Burnaby and Surrey folk dancers' homes. For the last three festivals, some dancers and teachers arrived by train from Calgary, travelling through the Rockies, to attend the festival.

Friday night parties feature music that is chosen by the participants, with Dale's online voting system. The most popular dances are featured. Teachers also introduce themselves by teaching a few teasers.

The Saturday evening party is always a highlight, and we can feel the energy of everyone in anticipation of the evening. We get dressed up in a costume or wear something festive. We enjoy the nourishing ethnic food the caterers provide.

The evening becomes even more special with the wonderful and amazing local performance groups. Some of the teachers perform, and we are so appreciative when they do this for us. Over the years, Lori Larsen assembled the entertainers. We have been enthralled by: Gradina (Serbian), Vuk Karadžić (Serbian), Vancouver Turkish Choir, Kvitka Ukrainian School of Dance, Tamburaski Orkestar Kardinal Stepinac (Croatian), Kariatis Dancers (Turkish, Bulgarian, Balkan), Philhellenic Folk Dancers (Greek), Kitka and Zornitza (Bulgarian), Sofia (Bulgarian), Romanian Treasure Group (Choir), Roma Gry (Romani).

Now, we come to the part of the evening for which everyone has been eagerly waiting—dancing to live music.



Yves Moreau with Kitka Bulgarian Dancers, Lyrids 2017.

Photo by Milada Dzevitskaya.



At the come-back festival (return to in-person dancing) in 2023, Steve, Genci, and Lee were climbing on top of each other. Photo by Jim Gold Tours.

Over the years, dancers have enjoyed Kafana Republik, Orkestar RTW, Osem I Devet with Miamon Miller, Orkestar Unbound (Bill Cope & friends), and for the last two years, Zakuska. We are very happy to have Zakuska joining us for our final twelfth festival in 2026. You don't want to miss that!

In April 2021, we hosted an online festival with Tineke and Maurits van Geel and we are excited to have them in person for our final festival (April 17–19), presenting Armenian, Roma, and international dances.

The Lyrids Committee

The committee is made up of inspiring people who bring their own strengths to create an amazing festival for everyone.

We wish to thank all our committee members for all their time and effort in making each festival the best: Dale Adamson, Nada Dosenovic, Judith English, Margaret Hansen, Melvin Klassen, Jane Kupfer, Lori Larsen, Sophie Larsen, Melanie Marchand, Elissa Mladjo, Bev Neilson, Christine Nenno, Chrisanne Pennimpede, Susan Pinkham, Jana Rickel, Kathy Sandstrom, Marcy Wolter, and many volunteers that have helped with all tasks to be done in making the festival a success, such as the registration desk, shop, snacks, decorating, putting up the names of dances on the board, putting up and taking down the tables, and take down after the festival. We look forward to many volunteers helping us this year to make our final festival the best!

For most of the festivals, Jane Kupfer organized the Festival Shop. It became a bit of a reunion for local dancers when

(Continued on page 14)

Lyrids (Continued from page 13)

And a memorable group photo is taken after much herding and cajoling! Photo by Bruce Sharpe—Lyrids 2014.



The “enduring” committee in 2017. L to R: Chrisanne, Jane, Bev, Lori, Melanie, Dale. Missing: Sophie. Photo by Trev and Shirley Sue-A-Quan.

she contacted former Burnaby club dancers to become shopkeepers. Elissa Mladjo has now taken the reins. It is a great place to pick up something ethnic. Value Village is being searched for cultural troves as we speak! Check out the Festival Shop to see what has been sourced this year!

Long after the festival is done, Dale (with her video and music compilations) and Bev and Melanie, sequentially, distill the balance sheet. Sophie Larsen spent many hours creating the Lyrids cross-stitched banner and myriad coveted paper decorations for the tables and walls.

“I may not get to know everyone at the festival, but when I dance in a circle holding hands with everyone, I feel I am part of a community. I am happy and at peace and leave the festival feeling like sharing and bringing people together with the joy of dancing. Happy dancing!”—Chrisanne Pennimpede

“One of the most rewarding aspects of Lyrids has been the opportunity to bring world-class folk dance instructors into our own community. They are world-renowned choreographers and cultural ambassadors who brought their artistry, humor, and passion to every workshop. These master teachers—many of them cultural icons in their own right—did more than teach steps; they ignited joy. Their warmth, humor, and knowledge made folk dancing accessible and exhilarating. Lyrids helped people discover that folk dance isn’t just good exercise for the body and mind—it’s tradition, connection, celebration, and pure fun.”—Dale Adamson

Let’s make this last Lyrids a joyful crescendo worthy of its legacy.



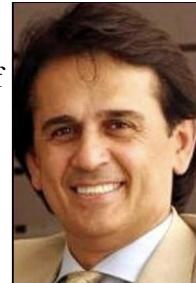
Lyrids 2024 at the Pitt Meadows Heritage Hall.

IFC FOLK DANCE WEEKEND

Murray & Randi Spiegel, Morristown, New Jersey and Joan Hantman (Los Angeles, California)

SAVE THE DATE for a wonderful weekend in New York: IFC’s featured teachers are **Ercüment Kılıç and Andy Taylor**, May 13–15, 2026, at picturesque Sylvan Lake.

Ercüment’s Turkish and Azerbaijani dances are always thrilling and unique, and super-fun to dance. Andy is teaching a new set of Carpathian dances researched by Michael Protenic’s family. Andy’s teaching was a hit at last year’s Stockton Folk Dance Camp, and she has dozens more great dances after interviewing Mike.



Adding to the fun: We are excited that Ercüment is bringing the Narts Dance Ensemble to give us a rousing performance of dances from all around Azerbaijan.



Circle Lodge’s well-known hospitality, delicious meals, ice cream social, Friday evening wine, and huge wood dance floor all create a welcoming and unforgettable weekend.

Youth Scholarships are available too! For more info, and pics of the gorgeous venue, visit IFC-NY.com.

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