

Lyrids Folk Dance Festival – A Historical Perspective

By Bev Nielson

As I came to the task of summarizing the Lyrids Folk Dance Festivals, I asked Burnaby Folk Dance members on the committee to contribute by saying why one festival was their favorite, 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 for 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 Bozigian & 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 Marcetic (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 with some schools to engage our world-class teachers in their settings. 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. But 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 who wanted to share their ethnic recipes, and we created a digital Lyrids Folk Dance Festival cookbook.

<https://lyridsfolkdancefestival.org/cookbook/>

Also, some of our creative and artistic committee members designed and made stars that people could order and make at home. These stars were 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.

<https://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, had a clear sense of mission and 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 tied 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 on who to invite for our first teachers, and 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, and 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 myself in that country for the weekend with the teachers, the catered food, the band, the participants, the performances, the festival shop, and the many other activities such as the singing and drumming workshops we have had in the past.”—Chrisanne Pennempede

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 the styling, nuance, and spirit of the dances. These recordings are more than souvenirs—they are living archives of a 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 Lyrids Folk Dance Festival website, creating an archive of festival DVDs, creating the registration form and a system for sorting data, handling technical/behind-the-scene requirements of the festival, hosting many of the teachers, creating posters and flyers, and having an after-festival party at her house with many of the teachers attending. She makes the festival last a little longer so we can socialize and dance a little more if our dancing feet will let us. Thanks Dale! And Bruce Sharpe, Dale's partner, has been a king-pin with his computer and sound equipment! Hauling the equipment to the site is already a big 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

Dancers bring so much energy to the festival with their eagerness to learn 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 to make it OUR space. Where venue rules allow it, we hang banners from many clubs. Arrival and check-in starts on Friday afternoon. It's wonderful to see friends from previous festivals meet 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, traveling through the Rockies to attend the festival.

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



Yves Moreau with Kitka Bulgarian Dancers, Lyrids 2017.
Photo by Milada Dzevitckaya.

The Saturday evening party is always a highlight. We get dressed up in costumes, 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).

At the come-back festival (return to in-person dancing) in 2023, Steve, Genci, and Lee were climbing on top of each other. And a group photo was taken with much herding and cajoling!

Now, we come to the part of the evening that everyone has been eagerly waiting for: dancing to live music. 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 and 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, presenting Armenian, Roma, and international dances.



Photo by Jim Gold Tours.



Lyrids 2014 Group Photo. Photo taken by Bruce Sharpe.

The Lyrids Committee

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

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 the many volunteers that have helped make the festival a success by helping with 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!



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

For most of the festivals, Jane Kupfer organized the Festival Shop. 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 Shop to see what has been sourced this year!

Long after the festival is done, Dale (with her video and music compilations), Bev, and Melanie 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." —Chrisanne Pennimpede



2024-at the Pitt Meadows Heritage Hall.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of Lyrids has been the opportunity to bring world-class folk dance instructors right 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. 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. All the Lyrids photos are here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/daleadamson/collections/72157661293924450/>

Compiled and written by Bev Neilson on behalf of the Lyrids Folk Dance Festival Committee 2026.

The Northwest Folk Dancer, February 2026

Giving Back to Northwest Folklife

By Susan Flagler

All of us—dancers, musicians, performers—get so much from each annual Northwest Folklife Festival. Below are some of the ways we can give back to Folklife. The process Seattle Balkan Dancers (SBD) used to host a benefit for Northwest Folklife this January is described below. Reasons that planning a fundraiser is easy for participatory dance groups are given. Lastly, ways performing groups and individuals can give back to Northwest Folklife are described.

In late 2025, SBD decided to have a fundraiser for Northwest Folklife in early 2026. As a participatory dance group that has live music every month or two, SBD is familiar with the popular local bands. A decision was made to have two bands of differing styles for the three-hour Balkan dance benefit in order to draw more people. The first two bands contacted readily agreed to donate their music to a benefit for Northwest Folklife. Once SBD knew the bands could make the selected date, Michelle Searle, Community Outreach Coordinator for Northwest Folklife, was contacted. From that point, the benefit became a joint effort between SBD and Folklife. Michelle secured an appropriate emcee for the benefit, designed a poster to advertise it, arranged for and provided the needed sound equipment and management, and recruited a team of Folklife volunteers to help at the benefit. SBD paid for the rent of the hall so that all donations would go to Northwest Folklife. During the event, SBD staffed the entry table to receive donations.

Folklife fundraisers invariably draw a large crowd. Some of the key reasons having a fundraiser for Northwest Folklife is easy for participatory dance groups are:

- Already have the venue.
- Know the popular bands. Bands are often willing to donate their time and talent to support Folklife.
- Northwest Folklife collaborates to assist.

Performing groups might contribute to a fundraiser hosted by a participatory dance group, or consider donating a percentage of the revenue from a concert or performance to Northwest Folklife.

As you begin thinking about having a fundraiser for Northwest Folklife, contact Michelle Searle, michelle.s@nwfolklife.org. Your group will receive tangible help in planning and carrying out your benefit.

We all can give back to Northwest Folklife as individuals. Northwest Folklife welcomes gifts of any amount. However, if you donate an annual amount of \$120 or more, you become a Friend of Folklife. Go to <https://nwfolklife.org/support/friends-of-folklife.html> to see the benefits one receives for each level of giving. Yet, in my opinion, clearly the best gift is the annual Northwest Folklife Festival itself.

FINAL LYRIDS FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL



Sponsored by:
Burnaby International
Folk Dancers

Friday, April 17
to Sunday April 19, 2026

Pitt Meadows Heritage Hall, 12460 Harris Road
30 km east of Vancouver, BC, Canada

Full-Time
or
Part-Time

Tineke & Maurits van Geel
Armenian, Roma, & International Dances



- Three Catered Meals
- Allergies Sensitive Menu
- Plenty of Snacks Provided
- Hardwood floor and stage
- Festival Market
- Free Parking



Fragrance Free!



Saturday Party Band
Zakuska

www.LyridsFolkDanceFestival.org