

Zakuska

Compiled by Zakuska

In a region with a rich history of Balkan music and dance, the band Zakuska has quietly built a loyal following. Formed in Seattle in 2010, Zakuska has become a familiar and welcome presence at folk dance events and festivals in the Pacific Northwest. Zakuska began as group of friends with a desire to sing together. That casual start quickly evolved into a working ensemble, as dancers and listeners responded to the band's lively sound and dance music repertory. Zakuska has become a staple of Seattle's Balkan folk scene, appearing regularly at events such as the Northwest Folklife Festival and the Lyrids Folk Dance Festival.

The band's name offers a clue to its repertory and musical interests. In several Slavic languages, "zakuska" means "snack"—or a spread of small dishes shared with friends—an apt image for music meant to be enjoyed together. That welcoming approach carries through in both their performances and their close ties to the local dance community.



Zakuska is Jana Rickel (tamburas, violin, bass, percussion, and vocals), Susan Niemann (accordion, percussion, and vocals), Frederick Graves (kavals, flute, whistles, saxophones, percussion, and vocals), and Lizzy Pedersen (violin and vocals).

Former Members include Jan Tominaga, Krista Canterbury, Kathy Sandstrom, and Emily Doubt.



Initial Zakuska: Kathy Sandstrom, Jana Rickel, Emily Doubt, Sue Nieman.

Zakuska's repertory draws from across Southeastern Europe, (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Serbia, Romania, Croatia) and beyond (France, Canada, Armenia). The band specializes in songs and is especially known for its multipart vocal harmonies. While the music is for dancing, it is equally enjoyable for listening.

Zakuska aims to bring back old favorites as well as incorporate newly taught dances. They present folk dance staples such as Ajde Jano, Dospatsko, Karamfil, Joc de Leagane, and Hora Miresii, while adding to their repertoire with songs such as Apáno Stin Triandafillá.

Zakuska has performed at many of the region's major folk events. They are regular participants in Seattle's Northwest Folklife Festival and favorites at the Lyrids Folk Dance Festival in British Columbia, where they have been featured as the Saturday night dance band. In March of 2026 they will be performing at Eugene's Veselo Festival.



Growing the band: Jana Rickel, Kathy Sandstrom, Jan Tominaga, Sue Nieman, Fred Graves, and Krista Canterbury.

Closer to home, the group often plays for Seattle Balkan Dancers parties at the Russian Community Center, helping to anchor a lively and welcoming dance scene that attracts participants of all ages and experience levels.

Zakuska has presented many singing workshops and group singalongs at places such as Lyrids Folk Dance Festival. They have provided lyrics, and discussed specifics such as pronunciation, meaning, and musical content. They have created songbooks for Seattle Balkan Dancers and distributed information about folk singing. Above all, they have brought people together by helping them share in the creative process of music making.

All of Zakuska's members have been folk dancers for over 18 years, so they know the music from an experiential point of view, as well as a creative point of view. They are involved in the broader folk music and dance world, teaching, performing in other ensembles (Orkestar RTW, Balkanarama, Învârtim, Dave and the Dalmatians), and working closely with dance instructors and organizers.

Jana Rickel teaches Balkan and international folk dancing at Seattle Balkan Dancers, offering classes such as "Dances You Wish You Knew" and 6-week Intermediate Balkan Dance. She also teaches virtually at the Surrey International Folk Dancing Society. She has been teaching dance since 1975. Her vast knowledge of the dances ensures that Zakuska's repertory is varied, continues to grow, and pleases the dance communities. That connection shows in their performances and reflect a shared love of music, movement, and tradition.

As of 2026, Zakuska remains active and in demand, with appearances at festivals, dance parties, and community events throughout the region. Their staying power comes not from flash or novelty, but from consistency, musicianship, and a genuine commitment to bringing people together. In a music city that values creativity and connection, Zakuska continues to offer something special: music meant to be shared, danced to, and enjoyed in good company.