

# GRAPEVINE



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Grapevine is the newsletter of the Perth International Folk Dance Group. The Group meets Monday evenings at the Wembley Scout Hall in Jersey St., Jolimont. The evening begins at 7:00pm with a one hour dance lesson, followed by general dancing until late. For further information please call John ((08) 9444 4736) or Joy ((08) 9386 7438)

## Message from the President

I cannot believe that it has been almost a year since that last issue of *Grapevine*!! After our very busy 1996, the Group's 20th year, it has been a very quiet year on the local scene. The main reason is the even greater amount of travelling than usual. Generally we are a pretty mobile Group but 1997 has been exceptional. In our next issue *Grapevine* we will feature some of the travellers and their destinations.

Two of the main events of the year both involved Belço Stanev. In May Belço was in Perth for two weeks to run a series of workshops and in July we had a group visit to Bulgaria to experience our dances in their native state! More of this later in this issue. I would like to thank all those who entertained Belço while he was in Perth. My thanks particularly to Eve for hosting the party at her house on 3 May. As in 1996 Belço had his birthday while he was in Perth so we were able to celebrate it in style at the Williams' house on the 10 May. Thanks to everyone who came along to make it a memorable night. To be honest I had a virus, spent the evening in bed and only got up to make the presentation!

With all the foreign travel the Group has suffered some pressure on Monday night attendance and the Committee is considering an increase to the membership fees and the Monday night fees.

The travels also involved two of our dance teachers; Palenqué, who was away for nine months; and John, over three months, so very special thanks go to Eve and to Sara for taking up the slack and taking on the extra work.

We are already working on the next issue of *Grapevine*, which should be out before Christmas. Planned as bumper issue it will focus on traveller's tales from around the world. Look out for it and let me know if you'd like to contribute!!

Also in this issue we pose and address the question 'why are we here?', asking 'what are the objectives of the Group?'

**Martin Williams, President of PIFDG**

## In this issue

- The Group's Bulgarian visit
- A Bulgarian Ballad
- 1997 Performances
- What's it all about?

## What's it all About??

Why do we dance? What is it all about? Well I'm sure that individually we have a number of different reasons for dancing. Some suggestions might be; because we like it, because we enjoy the social side of the Group, because we like a challenge for the right and left sides of our brains, or perhaps to come to grips with which is our left foot and what to do with the one on the other side.

After the philosophical question of why **we** do it might come the questions 'what is the Group all about?', 'why does the Group dance?', 'what is the Group here for?' While preparing for the AGM recently I was browsing through the Constitution and came across the following objectives of the Group:

- To promote, teach and encourage the art of folk dancing in Western Australia,
- To collect and record folk dances from diverse ethnic groups and cultures,
- To collect and record folk dance music and
- To perform folk dances and maintain folk dance as a part of the Western Australian culture.

Sometimes I think we do really well in meeting these objectives and sometimes not so well. As a bottom line I think it is worth examining our mission and goals occasionally to remind ourselves why we are here. In the meantime keep enjoying it, keep up the challenges and keep up the social interactions.

### Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held on 22 November immediately after the teaching at 8:30.

Nominations are invited for the new Committee and all positions.

### 1997 Performances

As with other facets of our activities, performances have also suffered a bit this year. The main events have been Fairbridge and Joondalup. Two other performances earlier in the year were at Stringy Bark Winery and at the Turkish restaurant in Fremantle.

Of course performances don't just happen, they need co-ordinators, choreographers and dancers, so our thanks first of all to the dancers. Thanks also to Pam Williams and Art Diggle for co-ordinating Fairbridge and Joondalup respectively. Special thanks to John Whaite and to Eve Blair for choreographing the dances for the two events.

Joondalup Festival is the new event which the WAFF, the local Folk Federation, held recently to replace Toodyay Festival which has not run for a couple of years now. A copy of our Joondalup flyer which includes our dance programme is included with this newsletter.

### Other 1997 Happenings

We had a Mediterranean theme night at the end of June. Sara did a wonderful job that night as by a combination of 'travel fever' and other sickness she was the only teacher. Well done, and thanks Sara.

On the subject of theme nights it has been suggested that we currently have too many theme nights in a year and that we should revert to only having them when there are five teaching nights in a month. If you have any strong feelings on this you might pass them on to a member of the Committee.

March saw quite a few members at Leone's house for a **Red Faces** night. This flushed out the forgotten flair with some healthy harmonica playing, pertinent poetry, a proliferation of Pam Massey promotions, and the Terrific Toothless Teachers ...to name a few.

### Coming soon

- Another bumper issue of *Grapevine*
- Red Faces night at Leone house 5 Dec
- 17 Nov. AGM
- 22 Dec. Christmas Party

### Bulgaria 1997

When Belço first invited us to join him in Bulgaria there was the suggestion that we might charter a 'plane!! In the end we got things into perspective and there were 8 dancers from PIFDG who made the trip. To make up the numbers we were joined by other dancers from Western Australia, from the Eastern States, NZ, America, Germany and Norway. Our truly international band had a great time. There were many dimensions to the trip and in this issue Pam Massey and Pam Gunn cover the dancing and the singing aspects.

One of the highlights of the visit was the series of farewell skits presented to Belço and Violetta and our other hosts there on the terrace under the stars. One of the earthly stars that night was Cyndie who read her poem *Balkan Ballad*. We have included a copy with this *Grapevine* and I think you will agree that it is truly a brilliant *Balkan Ballad*. Great poem Cyndie.

### Singing In Bulgaria by Pam Gunn

Our trip wasn't all dancing. Every day that we weren't off 'site-seeing', we had the opportunity to attend Bulgarian language classes, run by Violetta (aided sometimes by Mimi, Belço's granddaughter), followed by a singing session by Danço the gaida player. I only attended two of the language classes, thinking that to be able to say "Good day" and ask the appropriate directions to the loo would be enough for me. However, I was much more interested in the singing, hoping to be able to take some songs back to the choirs I am in and also to encourage singing along to dances on Monday nights.

It was a bit of a struggle getting our tongues around some of the phrases but in the end we learnt three songs – Dimitrio, Poza spa li iagodo and Moré Sokol Pié, in three-part harmony. Later, Belço taught us the dances to go with the songs.

On our last evening in the village of Koprivshtitsa we had a delightful encounter with a group of about 15 young women who turned up at our restaurant and suddenly started singing beautiful harmonies. They turned out to be the Danish Bulgarian Women's Choir visiting from Copenhagen for singing workshop sessions starting the next day. It's a pity we didn't have more time together. Still, I have captured some of their songs on my small tape recorder.

Another treat was listening to members of the Bulgarian State Folkloric Ensemble singing at the Karlovo Heroes Day celebrations in between the folk dancers' performances. Some of the amazing sounds the women produced sent tingles up and down my spine!

On our second last night at the camp in Lozen, Belço told us he had arranged a get together with the local folkloric group. Somehow I envisaged a group of young people like the members of the State Ensemble. Much to my surprise a group of the old women from the village turned up in their beautiful costumes and proceeded to sing us their wonderful call and response type songs. Later we tried our three songs out on them and we all joined in dancing the slower dances in our repertoire. We were also treated to the fine solo voice of Suejana who is in the State Ensemble.

More singing of a non-Bulgarian nature was heard at our final in-house concert night. Three of our German members (including Gisela) gave us renditions of songs from their homeland, the three Pams did their "Pamela" song and the whole group thanked the organisers and teachers with a rousing "Blagadaria" to the tune of "The Alleluia Chorus".

### **Bulgarian Banter by Pam Massey**

I, along with other International travellers, have been asked to write an article about my version of the GREAT BULGARIAN TOUR. So brace yourselves

14 July; flew from London to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. Peter Fallon, Cyndie and I all met up at Gatwick and flew in together. At Sofia airport we met Pam Gunn in the next customs queue, on her way from Rome; and out there in the madding crowd we met Belço, Pam and Martin and Belço's wonderful co-ordinator Violetta, who became everyone's friend and problem solver, topped off with a great sense of humour.

About two thirds of our 23 person party travelled on the bus the 150 km from Sofia to the village of Koprivshitz where we were to spend 8 days. Most of us were housed in a big YELLOW wooden house, with heavy wooden garden gate, high brick wall and a secluded garden which we often relaxed in of an 'arvo. Our days would start with the clippety-clop of cows' hooves passing by on the cobble stoned streets outside our window and the jingle of their bells. The daylight would end in a similar way, as

these 30 or so cows came home, their owners, mostly old women, waiting in the street with a stick, chatting to another old woman waiting for her cows to come home too. It looked a lovely stress-free daily ritual, though probably non-profit making. Unemployment is over 80%, so they probably made just enough milk to cover their Bulgarian cornflakes!

We walked over a little stone bridge spanning the stream that flowed through the village, to the restaurant about 2 mins. away, where we had all our meals while in 'Kop'. I think we were a bit of a culture (Kulcha?) shock to the waitresses there, with our strange Norwegian, German, New Zealand and Australian eating habits and ways, not to mention all that terrible Bulgarian folk music we kept playing!! They were glad when we left the restaurant so that they could put some 'real' music on!

Some days we danced ..... it was a very satisfying balance of dancing, sight seeing and free time. The closest I've ever been to a package tour (heaven forbid!) but with more freedom, and with a choice of 23 people to mix with or not mix with as the fancy took you. I must say I thought our 8 PIFDG'ers mixed and mixed well. We had two 'official' non-participants, our very own Ron Hill, and another husband, Ray from Sydney, both fitting in well. With Ron on pipe and Ray on mouth organ we all had a jolly sing-song on the bus ... 'here we go, here we go, here we go ....' as we visited various monasteries around the country.

Dancing was often a few hours in the morning, and a few hours late afternoon; not too much to handle. It was in the school at the other end of the village. The walk to and from there always made interesting by the umpteen horse drawn hay carts trotting back and forth, making hay while the sun shone; a lovely sight. Fascinating too, as no mechanical machinery is used, hay still cut with a scythe, load up the cart with a pitch fork, and sit on the top of the load on the way home, then pitch again into the barn above the stable where no doubt the cow is kept during the snowy winter months. I loved to watch this, and one of the highlights of the trip was walking out of the village, into the fields among the workers, and getting a ride back on the hay cart!

We learned 18 dances, re-learned in some cases, as several were dances Belço had taught us on his Perth visits. The floor was wooden, with a few pit-falls. Belço, his son Julian and his daughter-in-law Irena,

all taught us; Belço being the most charismatic. Irena being the most graceful and Julian the most exhausting! Mimi, Belço's 10 year old granddaughter was also there - a delightful girl with her grandfather's charisma.

The piano accordion player, Stoyan, played every lesson, which was better than tapes because the teacher could say 'stop - start - slow - fast - this bit - that bit'. Although I sometimes thought the musos interpreted 'slow' as 'quiet' because it did not seem very slow to me!! In the evenings Danço, the other muso, joined us, playing a Bulgarian flute called a 'kaval'. Danço also played the goat strangling pipes, even whilst reading the newspaper! Some evenings they played in the restaurant and some evenings they went out into the street, where we danced. I hoped some locals would join in but only one drunk staggered into our circle!

We had a guided tour of the village on two mornings. by the enthusiastic Dimitri (no not a Greek!), who took us round the many houses that had been made into museums because someone famous had lived there. The village population is 3,500; 5,000 in summer. For anyone who is interested the population of Bulgaria is 10 million, Sofia 1.5 million and the country is 400km x 500km. Eight years ago it was communist, when there were no rich and no poor and the streets of Sofia were safe to walk at night.. With 80% unemployment of course the crime rate's rocketed, .... but there is much more choice in the stores ....'. One big store in Sofia was just like Myers, only a film cost me \$20!! Mostly however, Bulgaria is very cheap, like 3 coffees for \$1.60 or so.

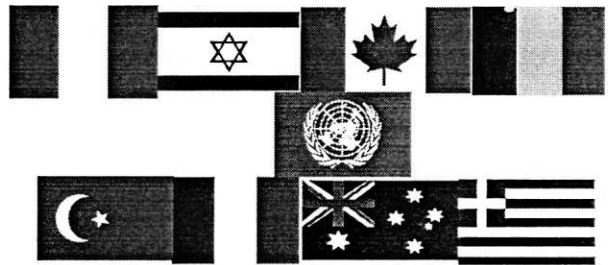
Our half day in Sofia, Cyndie and I spent exploring the plane tree lined streets; watching the groups of men playing chess on tatty cardboard chess boards in the park; observing some interesting old architecture and following the yellow brick road.

Another day we went to the town of Karlovo, 60km away, where the Bulgarian State Dancers were performing in the town square, to a full and fine band of traditional instruments. The dancers were quick, slick, energetic .... and young. Costumes and dancers were of great variety. Gisela even shook hands with the President of Bulgaria!

On the way back from Bachovsko Monastery another day we stopped at Bulgaria's second largest city, Plovdiv which is a mixture of modern, old,

Roman and McDonalds! It was a hot Sunday afternoon as our bus load of wilting dancers explored the back streets of the old and attractive town, which we had almost to ourselves.

Our last full day at 'Kop' was my highlight. We walked up the mountain from the village, into Julie Andrews country, where we danced on one of the seven Sabor Festival stages, against the most wonderful mountain-view backdrop, beside a flock of sheep-with-bells, and their shepherd. The sun shone, we had a picnic, and it was a lovely finale to Koprivshitzta.. If I had boarded the plane and left the country after that, I would have been satisfied.. We had our ice-cream and now we were down to the cone! Our second location, in an unattractive village in the hills outside Sofia, where we spent our last 5 days in a residential establishment, had accommodation (I slept on the wardrobe shelf because the mattress was too saggy) and a clean but sterile dining room. We danced on the terrace, which was nice, only white and glary in the sun; and sometimes in a cooler, dingy hall. Everyone was getting tired. Evenings we danced some more on the terrace; we watched a full moon rise and one evening we put on a concert for our hosts. Nine 'acts' in all, Peter opening and closing the show on the goat-strangly pipes, which he had been working hard at learning all week. Then for the grand finale all 23 of us sang o the tune of the Alleluia Chorus, Blagadaria! (Thank you), which is a good note to finish on, particularly as it's gone midnight and I am off to Rotto in the morning!!



### Follow that!

So there you have two perspectives on our trip to Bulgaria. I am sure there are plenty more. When John wrote about his trip there some years ago he said 'I could write about the country (beautiful), the economy (in ruins), the cafe life (dominant), unemployment (very high), crime (organised and poverty driven), the people (frustrated) ... he chose to write about dance!!

The next issue of *Grapevine* will focus on other travel tales for the year. Look out for it and if you'd like to contribute please let me know!

## A BALKAN BALLAD

They arrived on various aircraft, some by bus or train,  
To learn the Balkan dances and explore this fair terrain.  
They put on all their dancing shoes to hop to Belcho's beat,  
I discovered it was hard work learning knitting with one's feet.

And they all were quite amazing with their energy and bounce  
In that village in the valley with the name I can't pronounce.

The cowbells woke us in the morn , the roosters were a-crowling,  
And horses pulling hayloads, I don't know where they're going.  
There were pinetrees on the mountain tops and silver birch which shimmer  
The evening took a special glow as light of day came dimmer.

The toilets were of interest as we studied ways to flush  
And I'll never view a serviette without the need to blush,  
And there is a strange translucent drink that tastes of aniseed  
It caused me to have hiccoughs and throughout the night I peed.  
The food was spiced and sumptuous with lamb and beef so leano  
and the beer that looks so frothy when its poured like cappuccino.

The atmosphere inspiring with its energy and bounce  
In that village in the valley with the name I can't pronounce.

There was a kiwi lady with her baggage of High Tech  
Cameras and videos all dangling round her neck,  
And the Kidds who seemed to think that being early was a crime  
Till I realised that their watches both were still on English time.  
An Aussie lass here had a laugh so raucous and so violent  
that the dogs all started barking and the roosters became silent.

There're loads of Pams about the place , and one has said with glee  
"I really do believe I swear that some talk more than me."  
And one of them is terrified to show she could be mellow  
so she sports hot pink and blue green tights and T shirts brightest yellow.  
Another one has deep blue eyes , and the longest hair,  
She's never ever missed a dance, her footwork has such flair.

Our redhead guy with trousers with the most Bulgarian look  
Writes with earnest effort all the dances in his book,  
And another who is tall and thin who's really quite a catch  
With shorts so short and socks so black with laceup shoes to match.

Yes they really are amazing with their energy and bounce  
In that village in the valley with the name I can't pronounce.

A Viking resurrected from the Land of Midnight Sun  
wields videos as if there is a battle to be won,  
And a German American hybrid who is trying to be a Greek  
as she wafts around doing grapevines when ere there is a break.  
A Mum and daughter came to town so blithe and full of chat,

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Neither of them would be seen without a crazy hat,  
And Chris who always laughs and jokes face wide with cheerful smiles,  
So I know she can't be constipated nor can she have piles.  
And Josephine who yelled so much she went and lost her voice,  
But seeing her close to Belcho's ear I think it was her choice.

Another chappie thin of limb prances like a foal  
You'd think his feet were trying to escape a red hot coal,  
And Gaby such a beauty, and always just so chic  
They really are a picture as they hop and jump and kick.

There were ladies in the upstairs room whose catchery I could see  
was "We're all locked outside again, who's got the bleeding key."  
There's Joy the one who started it with letters to and fro,  
We're grateful for her efforts as she made this trip a go,  
And Ron who is so chirpy, his jokes are quite a feat  
as he walks about with shooting stick that turns into a seat.  
Gisela eats the strangest things I never did ask why,  
till I saw a pile of olive pips reaching to the sky.

Yes we're really all amazing with our energy and bounce  
In that village in the valley with the name I can't pronounce.

We took a trip one day past fields and mountains high and craggy,  
Past storks on rooves and many goats and little dogs so shaggy.  
We spotted monasteries with art but you should hear my groans  
After trundling round Plovdiv on those streets of cobblestones.  
Another night we sang and danced outside the restaurant  
Till the Danish mob from down below began to sing and chant,  
And the musos with their fingers deft, were for us a boon  
As we spun and whirled with lightning speed underneath the moon.

There is a special woman whose name is Violetta  
I know for one I've never found a human being better,  
She always is so cheerful, to us a special friend  
as she herds us on to buses, and out the other end.  
She taught us well the language of this fair and distant land  
With Mimi always at her side giving her a hand,  
Teaching "Dobo den" and "molya" and "dai te me cafe"  
"Kder e toilet na ta, is venete" and "strave".

But most of all I can't forget this favourite man called Belcho  
Who led the dance till our feet were pulp and shoes began to squelcho.  
His kindness and his laughing eyes so full of hearty fun  
That for each of us I know that that he is always Number One.

And he's really so amazing with his energy and bounce  
In that village in the valley with the name I can't pronounce.

But putting pen away now, I'll not bore you with more blarney  
So Chaio, Auf Wiedersehen, Adieu, Goodbye and Dovidane.

Cyndie Innes

*Think Dance -- Think PFDG*  
*The Perth International Folk Dance Group*