

GRAPEVINE



Volume 8, Number 2, December 1997

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 90 minute 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

Well another year has almost gone. A year in which we seemed to have as many Group members overseas as we had back here in Perth. A year in which we hosted Belço Stanev for some memorable workshops in May. A year in which a number of the Group visited Bulgaria in July, and a year in which we ended with a number of issues that have to be addressed in 1998.

Our recent AGM saw a new Committee with a few changes since 1997. The outgoing Committee had five meetings during the year and at its last meeting it reviewed its finances and recommended putting the fees up. Monday night attendance was increased by a dollar, and the annual membership fees were increased by \$2. The main reasons behind this were the hall hire fees which went up recently by 50% and a big increase in insurance fees. One other financial fact is that we have lost money on all but one of our major workshops in the last two years. The Group must reverse this trend and the Committee is currently reviewing our events and workshop programme for 1998. We would welcome your views on the events, on the issues and on ideas for funding future events.

New Committee Members

I am pleased to welcome Kay Forsyth to the 1998 Committee and also to welcome two people back to the Committee; Pam Massey, who was President in 1996, and Palenqué Blair who was away for most of our 1997 Committee year. This will add some right brain balance to what some would say was a somewhat male dominated Committee!!

With Joy away we have had only two *Grapevines* this year and I have put those together myself. Many thanks to those who have contributed articles this year. In this issue of *Grapevine* we begin a series of travellers tales which will probably keep us going for several *Grapevines* to come, and we start on mainland Europe with John Whaite on French and Spanish village festivals, and some Parisienne patter from Palenqué.

Travel Fever

In the last issue of *Grapevine* we discussed the large number of Group members who have been away this year. With this issue we have included a summary of our travellers and some of their ports of call. If you would like to share some of your dance related travel stories please let us have your copy for inclusion in *Grapevine*.

Keeping in touch

If you missed out on your October *Grapevine* please let us know and we'll send you one. Better still come and collect one yourself from the Hall on a Monday night!!

Quite a few of the Group are now on e-mail, so if you would like to contact me try the following address. The Group is also considering setting up a Web site so watch this space!!

E-mail address: martin.williams@wpcorp.com.au

Issues

The Group has been wrestling with a number of issues recently. These are related to membership and to finances. Membership of the Group has dropped significantly over a number of years and we need to reverse this trend. Loss of membership has reduced funds flowing into the Group and this has been compounding by a large insurance increase, a 50% increase in hall hire fees, and losses on a number of our recent workshops.

Fee increases

To address our more immediate financial problems the annual membership fees have been increased as follows:

General membership	\$20
Concession:	\$14

Monday night attendance has also been increased:

Members	\$4
Non-members	\$6

Beginners Course

The Group urgently needs to attract new members and a number of initiatives will be followed during the year. One of these will be to run a beginners' course in 1998 to attract and retain some more members. This will follow on from the successful beginners' courses in 1993 and in 1995.

A new name for PIFDG!!

The Committee has proposed that the Group should have a new name in an attempt to change its image and to attract new members. The proposal, endorsed by the recent AGM, is to drop the word 'folk' from the title.

The new name which will be used on a short term basis pending any Constitutional amendments and a competition to select a permanent name is:

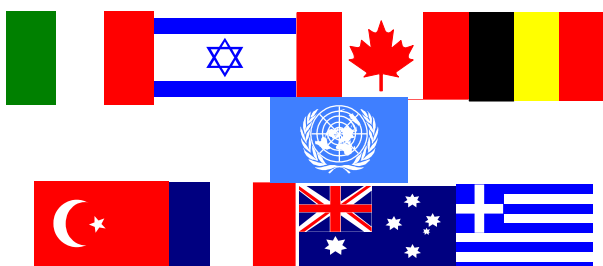
Perth International Dancers

We will cover the competition in future Grapevines so don't miss your chance to have your say.

Season's Greetings!!

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a very prosperous New Year. See you soon, I hope.

Martin Williams, President of PIFDG



Christmas Party

This year's Christmas Party is on 22 December. Please come and help us to celebrate, even if you have not been to dancing recently - we'd like to see you again. Make the evening go really well by wearing Christmas colours or by wearing something ethnic. The normal theme night format will be followed, so bring a small plate of finger food to share while we socialise during a longer-than-usual break from dancing. A great chance to catch up with old friends.

The regular Monday nights will recommence on 5 January 1998.

Festival Fremantle 1997

Last year we joined in the Festival Fremantle Street Parade. This year we staged a Performance in the Woolstores as part of the Festival. We've had a few problems with stages at recent performances. Either they are full of equipment, or they are too small. This time the stage was too small but the good news was that it was also light enough to move. So we danced in front of the stage after we had pushed it out of the way!!

Many thanks to all our performers who covered the ten dances in a quick and slick show. The feedback was very good.

Palenqué's French Dancescapes

For a variety of reasons (such as that my kind Mum had bought me a return ticket to Europe, and I had learned French at school), I spent the first six months of this year, 1997, living in France, on the outskirts of Paris. I was living in a very leafy university 'suburb' a little over half an hour from Paris centre by train. After a couple of months of settling in time - getting the 'flu, working out what the hell the research I was supposed to be doing was and meeting the local student population - I managed to make contact with Hughette Roi, the Parisian accordionist who had taught some French folkdance to us in Wembley a few years ago. Several more weeks went by before I finally arranged to meet her at a 'Bal'. I was given elaborate instructions on getting there - the other side of Paris - by metro, and arrived on the run about an hour late not really knowing what to expect. Of course, it had hardly started and there had been no need to rush, however Hughette was busy playing along with about ten other musicians, so I didn't get to introduce myself to her for an hour or so. In the meantime, several people were very friendly and introduced themselves to me and I was not short of a partner for some time. The place where the dancing was held was a small (by our standards) community centre.

My first night there I was much impressed by the artwork covering the walls, so that for my second visit with the Art Exhibition obviously finished it seemed shockingly bare!! Entrance was 20F (~\$5) with drinks and 'plates' laid out to share. The cider was particularly popular. One week, a very good dancer in the form of an Arab-born single science teacher (male!) brought along a huge bowl of home made profiteroles. There must have been over a hundred of them, each conveniently mouth sized, yet still they could not be finished by the ravenous

Palenqué's French Dancescapades .. continued

hoards. So, you don't think your trusty rubbish bin scum wouldn't act true to form would you? I, of course took a plate of these deluxe things home on the train. And they got home and were eaten despite me and them nearly being killed that night by the most violent storm I've ever had the mischance to be out in. In the ten minutes it took me to run from the train to my residence, I had been drenched through a dozen times over, I'm sure, and nothing had been missed! This was at about half past midnight, and I don't think I've ever felt so much like I was acting in a film.

French Filmmaking

However, a couple of months later, I really did act in a film, featuring a *Bal* on the banks of the Seine. I was invited along by Huguette to dance as an extra, but this was not nearly so exciting. It was even more tedious than practising for a dance performance !!!

After several fortnightly expeditions to the other end of Paris for this cosy event, which it certainly was in the hot spring nights we had early on, the community centre was abandoned and a much more central location was adopted, weekly now. By this time I had managed to pick up most of the easier dances and I had just cottoned on to how to do the Mazurka. No dances were ever taught. Occasionally, it would be obvious who was leading a dance, and everyone would follow his - usually this Arab-born Mark I spoke of - led. A good half the dancing was of couple dances, so I had a lot more practice at turning than our Scandinavian performance ever gave me.

So, the following week, the group became a tourist attraction on the banks of the Seine, just at the point where many of the boat cruises turn around to head back around the islands of Paris. Music was still live. Musician numbers varied, as did the instruments available. We danced in a semi-circular amphitheatre where the water was the backdrop - literally if you took one step too many towards the river. However, the only person to fall in the whole summer was, the now notorious Mark, who jumped, in tradition to celebrate his friend's birthday. However, for those not in the know it was quite a scare. It was a good six feet down to the water and when he didn't appear for a few seconds my Dutch friends were getting ready to jump in to save him! He was hauled out by a rope he had thoughtfully left for the purpose.

"Fest" Day and Night!

Back to the subject of dance. Another type of dance event, quite popular in Paris is the Breton "Fest noz" - night party which basically consists of drinking, music and dancing - everything a good party should be.

There is a very large Breton community in Paris, due to Brittany being one of the poorest areas of France. I went to several such "fest noz" events, but the one which will stick in my memory above all was actually a "Fest diez" - ie, it was held during the day - a Sunday afternoon. I arrived half way through to find a completely packed, low-ceilinged, tiled type bar. It was an overcast, sultry afternoon, but the heat and humidity that hit you when you walked into the room was like a sauna, nothing less. Being a party there was a fairly solid wall of people lining the bar, which reduced down to a single layer thick in the middle of a good dance. The musicians rotated from bagpipes, button accordions to a deafening six man bugle band. All the dances were easy, often to the point of monotony. The most memorable, was the last dance which went on for about fifteen minutes, with the whole pattern of the dance taking about five seconds! By the time the musicians stopped, the whole floor of the room was wet with too many people breathing and sweating and everyone was exhausted. But not too exhausted to then take the dance out onto the street corner down the road for another couple of hours.

The "Grand Bal de l'Europe" at Gennetines

My final experience of dance in France was at the "Grand Bal de l'Europe" at Gennetines, a tiny little village in the Borbonnais region in central France, just north of the Massif Central for those interested in geography. I hitched the approximately five or six hours drive down there with an East German girl I met dancing. We were very happy and relieved to arrive finally at seven in the evening after only ten hours on the road. The set up was not dissimilar to our folk festivals, except that the camping area (the only form of accommodation within walking distance of the festival area) was completely separate from the festival marquees and buildings. There were workshops held throughout the day in traditional dances from many European countries, but the focus was definitely on French dance with some Italian, Basque and Catalan, Scottish, German and Québécois. Israeli was taught by some German enthusiasts, and there were some Greek and Bulgarian sessions. I met up with John and Mon at this festival.

In the evenings, 'Bals' in all the types of dancing we'd learnt were held with their bands, and the dancing continued. A small group danced all night and went to breakfast together. I only joined them once. In the breaks it was easy enough to find some musicians to jam with or to dance to.

I finally left for the drive back to Paris at about 3am after a night's dancing and slept all the following day!!

European Travels

John Whaite

A few years ago, Fiona Murdoch told me that she had spent a summer at village festivals around Europe. I couldn't visualise it at the time, but having spent the European summer with Mon in Catalonia and France at festivals and dance workshops, I can vouch that they are great.

Saint Chartier Festival, 12-14 July, \$90

Saint Chartier is a small village with a fine castle in central France, near La Chartre, and every year it has a hurdy gurdy and bagpipe festival. I was told by Russell Johnsen (who sometimes plays dance music for PIFDG) that Saint Chartier was "not the biggest, but certainly the best" French festival. Not any more, it is huge.

The festival proper is in the castle grounds. There was a main stage with amphitheatre seats, a large marquee, a large dance floor and band stage, a food area, and about a hundred stalls for instrument makers. Most of the instruments were hurdy gurdys and bagpipes, but there were other obscure folk instruments.

The music on stage was very international, with groups like Danu from Ireland, Sivka Katzeva from Bulgaria, Primera Nota from Catalonia, a Swiss multicultural band (including Phillip Griffin who was originally from Perth) with a gipsy dancer, and Australia's Xylosax (one of Linsey Pollak's creations). The final concert was by Joan Baez, and I estimated the crowd at about 5,000.

Away from the stages, the site was alive with music from people testing and demonstrating instruments and musos jamming. And the dance floor was running continuous dance lessons, mainly French dance of course.

Outside the castle grounds, 5 large dance floors were set up in the main square and a park. From midnight until 5am, bands played at each stage and the crowds danced. The bands were not amplified, and other bands played in any available space, so often people on one floor would be dancing to two different bands.

I had some magic moments and it was very exciting, but there was a down side. In some ways it was too big. You can have a weekend without paying - it is free to camp and dance and the streets are full of musicians and life, so lots of people turn up just for the party. There were too many people for the camping facilities, and among these masses of people were some opportunists - the people in the

tent next to ours had a pack stolen, and a man who gave us a lift had his bag and camera stolen.

Despite these problems, it a truly unique and memorable festival with a wonderful atmosphere, well worth being in.

Gennetines - La Grand Bal De L'Europe, 15-20 July, \$250 inc meals

Coming from Australia, I could never have imagined this event. La Grand Bal is held on a farm near the village of Gennetines in central France. There were 10 dance marquees, each had workshops in the morning and afternoon and several dance bands through the night, for 5 days. There were close to 2000 dancers and it was a problem to find dance space.

La Grand Bal de l'Europe is a misnomer - the festival is overwhelmingly French. There were lots of French regional workshops, plus Cajun and French Canadian, and Scandinavian taught by French teachers. I was told that the name started as a joke, a big name for a little festival in the middle of nowhere, but these days it isn't far from the mark. There were also Basque, Catalan, Israeli and Bulgarian workshops.

Apart from the sheer spectacle of size, I was very impressed by the intelligent organisation. In the showers were places to put your soap and hang your clothes, the camping area had tape barriers to ensure the access way was kept clear, there was a portable telephone block to call home, in the main office there was a shelf with power points for video camera and mobile phone battery chargers, and on the wall a list of people looking for rides, and so on.

Unlike many festivals, problems were dealt with. There was a whiteboard listing the workshops which was updated daily, set beside one of the dance stages. In this location, the people looking at the whiteboard were disrupting the workshops, so the whiteboard was moved a few metres away. When night fell, it was difficult to read the board in its new location, so lights were fitted to it. And everything was fine. Every niggle was seen to.

There was only camping accommodation, and meals were an optional extra. Most people opted for the meals and they were very good - typically lots of salad, some cold meat or cheese, bread, a dessert and a drink. I think it is the healthiest food I've ever seen from mass catering.

John's European Travels .. continued

It was a dazzling experience to have a choice of 10 workshops, and 10 dance venues at night. The teachers were all fine dancers, most were excellent teachers, although I found my lack of French a definite disadvantage. The biggest problem was crowding. One very popular Basque teacher, Paxti (I don't remember his last name), had about 500 people crammed into the marquee and on the ground outside, and he got the dancers to form lines which he then rotated so that everyone got a chance to see him demonstrate.

This is my most highly recommended event for dancers. I mentioned that every niggly was seen to. Well, to take care of the crowding problem, the organisers are planning to limit numbers in future, so you may have to book a year in advance to be in it.

Dansaneu at Esterri d'Aneu, 2-9 August, \$250 inc accommodation and meals

The rain in Spain falls mainly on the Pyrenees and while the lowlands sweltered in the August heat, Mon and I retired to the relative cool of the Pyrenean town of Esterri d'Aneu for Dansaneu, a residential course in Catalan traditional dance. Dansaneu was the highlight of my trip, but I can't recommend it because you either need to speak Catalan or have a translator.

The heart of the course was a series of workshops by Joan Serra with Quim Serra, who are traditional and creative dance teachers/ choreographers/ dancers. In the first workshop we were led through the process of creating a 'folkdance', and we made costumes and decorated our dance space. The second workshop was held in a pub, and worked on communicating through dance and movement. The third workshop was held in a church and worked on spirituality in dance. The fourth was held at the breakfast table, and worked on having fun with food and going hungry. The final workshop was a performance around the local museum house - in small groups we created a dance and performed it a few minutes after hearing the music - theatre sports like.

The workshops used techniques that I have seen in new age and business management courses that aim to restructure your thinking, and they created a wonderful camaraderie among the participants. The most memorable moment was at the end of the church workshop, when everyone was in a meditative mood. Joan Serra said his final word,

there was perfect silence as everyone took it in, and then a deafening thunderclap rang around the valley. Was it Somebody's exclamation mark, or Their rebuttal?

In parallel with these workshops were a series of dance collecting workshops - at the start we interviewed two old men from the village about a particular dance, then tried to reach a consensus on what the dance was. Another group did the same with two old women. We also tried to reconstruct the music from their memories. Essentially, the dance was just a bit of fun - dancers ran in a single line, each carry a blunt implement to whack other dancers and spectators on the bottom, and the line reversed direction whenever a cowbell rang. We had several different ideas on what the steps were, but concluded that the steps probably weren't as highly choreographed as the hand movements. Finally, we performed this and other dances from the town in the town's festa major (major festival), to the delight, surprise and pain of many of the locals.

A third stream of workshops were dedicated to Jota. Jota is the true Spanish dance. Flamenco is Spanish gipsy dance, 'Spanish' dance is only danced in parts of the country and is a stage dance rather than a folk dance, but Jota is danced everywhere, by all people. We saw historical film of Catalan Jota - no two people were dancing the same, but everyone was dancing.

Finally, every evening we had a social dance, even if it was just an informal get together with the musos in the pub. And after a few days of living, working and playing together, the social dances were like a big party with about 80 friends.

The thing that made this course outstanding was that it involved the dancers in the folk process. Most folk dance workshops are simply a guru handing out a series of dances to be learned, maybe with a few words on the background and some correction for style. I gave a two hour workshop and taught nearly as many dances as the rest of the course, but learning dances was secondary to developing an empathy with dances and their cultural context. In this it succeeded, and it was more fun than any other dance workshop I have seen.

.... **To be continued ..**

John's European tales will be continued in a future Grapevine.

He attended another four Catalonian and Pyrenean festas before heading off across Europe.

1997 - Absent with Leave

Just to give you some idea of just how much roving there was by Group members during 1997 the following is a brief list. If I have left anyone off this list please accept my apologies:-

Louise (and Laurie) are still in Mali – they did threaten to return around July. Either they have lost their calendar or have forgotten to wind up their metronome! We did have a post card from them recently of the Namib Desert, so they are still out there somewhere!

Joy (and Ron) left Perth in late May travelling to Europe for Mahol Europa after joining the Group in Bulgaria. They arrived back for a rest only recently.

Gisela left Perth in May just after Belço's workshops, spending time in Germany before travelling through Hungary and Serbia to the dance workshops in Bulgaria. Gisela is now an expert on transit visas for Serbia having been turned off the train at the Hungarian/Serbian border and forced to return to Budapest to sort out a valid visa. After Sofia and Varna we left her heading north into Romania. Gisela is due back in 1998.

Pam Massey spent our winter in the UK before travelling on to Bulgaria. She recently returned to Perth after spending more time in England and Europe.

John Whaite flew to Madrid in June, tracking across Europe to Koprivshitsa and Burgas in late July, before touring Turkey. John arrived back at the end of September.

Pam and Martin left in July for 6 weeks. During that time they went to the international dance festival in Bursa, Turkey, described as fantastic. After the Bulgarian dance workshops they returned to Turkey via Varna (Belço's home) and Nesebar.

Pam Gunn left Perth in early July arrived in Bulgaria from Rome and left, after the workshops, for a walking tour of Slovakia, later moving on to Austria. She arrived back in September.

Cyndie Visited her twin sister in England before flying to Bulgaria for the workshops, returning via London in September.

Peter Fallon flew to the workshops via London, returning early September. In October he headed off again this time to Holland for 4 weeks.

Eve, Palenqué and Karl left in November 1996 for Mexico and on to the UK for Xmas. Eve and Karl returning via Bangkok in February. Palenqué went on to France effectively taking a sabbatical; based in Paris, but touring other parts of Europe while she was over there. She returned in September to celebrate her 21st birthday, being away a total of nine months.

Paula and Russell Left for New Zealand in January, later visiting relatives in Los Angeles before crossing the US to Michigan and then on to Europe, where Russell travelled to Hungary to feed his Keshkeno habit! They returned with son Joshua in July.

Maree After her Bulgarian trip in 1996, Maree travelled to Sydney this year and is now in America (we think). Maree is due back sometime!!

Art and Michela went to India for 5 weeks in January.