

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS DECEMBER, 2018

“Sometimes in life confusion tends to arise and only the dialogue of dance seems to make sense.” Shah Asad Rizvi

Conversation about dance for my wife (Fiona) and I has been the most natural topic with any new people we have met. In a recent two week road trip to South Australia we have met many new people. Conversations with people about dance were often great ice breakers. Even while driving on those long boring roads between Orange and Broken Hill, it was the international dance music playing on our car-stereo which often eased the tension of the journey. Might I suggest you consider putting together a USB stick of International Folk Dances to play in your car, so that you too can go to a happy place in those times when you just need to mentally unplug after a long arduous journey.

One of the most interesting parts of our road trip were our encounters in Broken Hill. A place I would highly recommend, if only to see the heritage value of this unique Australian country town. While visiting with our host in Broken Hill, the conversation of Folk Dancing came up. The excitement on our host's face as she embraced this was truly astonishing. You see, our host had come from French origins. So, Fiona dutifully recalled and demonstrated a few French and Brittany Folk dances, which I was able to play from music I had downloaded to my iPhone. This led to all sorts of possibilities in the mind of our host, not the least of which was a follow-up idea. Our host wanted Fiona to apply for a “Broken Hill - Arts Grant” to be an artist in residence. You never know where a conversation about Folk dance will lead!

A further inspiration was our attendance at “The Royal” (Australia's 1st National Park) where we enjoyed a September weekend affectionately called “Dance Deli”. It was a smorgasbord of excellent music, friendship and of course, new folk dances to learn and celebrate, as we danced around an alphabetic theme. If you need more information about this annually themed event contact Kaye Laurendet for details. Alongside this we have been transfixed by our good friend Yorgo's appearance on an ABC -TV “Compass” program which covered the Spiritual aspects of Folk Dance and how it can refresh body and soul. This was part of the October Sydney Sacred Music Festival, celebrating the transformative power of music and dance and its ability to unite us no matter where we are from. An excellent dialogue which I believe is still available on ABC iview to revisit.

Have you paid your 2019 subscription membership to FDA yet? There is still time to take up this offer of \$20 for the electronic copy or \$25 for hard copy if paid before 31 December – a significant discount.

Following the success of our October edition of Footnotes with Qld items, I am delighted to announce that this edition has contributions from ACT International Folk Dance groups. We look forward to future editions featuring stories from the following Australian States and Territories:

VIC & TAS (February issue – submissions due by 15th January)

SA & NT (April issue – submissions due by 15th March)

Now truly enjoy your folk dancing, one *logical* step at a time...

Paul

FOCUS ON THE A.C.T.

U3A INTERNATIONAL FOLK DANCING IN CANBERRA

The lovely Russian dance *Sibirski Chorovod* was largely instrumental in my decision in 2005 to start Canberra's U3A Easy to Intermediate International Folkdancing (IFD) Group. I'd enjoyed learning this dance at the workshop given by Andre van de Plas in 2004 when I was also attending a U3A course on the famous Russian dramatist, Anton Chekov. This course was held on Thursday afternoons at ANU's University House where I also attended a Thursday lunchtime IFD class run by Paula Reid OAM. It occurred to me when Paula's group was doing *Sibirski Chorovod* that the U3A Chekov group would enjoy seeing this dance.

Shortly after the Chekov group saw us dancing not only *Sibirski Chorovod* but also *Zvarniara*, members of that group urged me to start a U3A IFD course, drawing on the long experience I'd had dancing with CIFDA (Canberra International Folkdancing Association) since 1976. This was indeed a challenge for me but because I'd benefitted from a number of courses since joining U3A in 1994, I felt it would be consistent with the U3A ethos to accept the challenge.

Although I'd had only limited experience teaching for CIFDA, I'd become an IFD enthusiast. Much of the appeal stemmed from the great variety of rhythms, moods, themes, formations, voice and instrumental combinations. I'd been uplifted and energised by this variety, being able to move to music that ranged from being energetic and boisterous to being elegiac and hauntingly beautiful. The fact that partners are not needed for most dances was also important for me as a singleton. I believed it was therapeutic active relaxation and it would surely be a most worthwhile endeavour to introduce this special enjoyment to other Third Aged, many of whom are now single and in some cases, coping with social isolation. I also hoped my formal teacher-training qualification and teaching experience back in the 1960's would help, along with my experience as co-leader of the U3A Dipping into Literature course from 1995 to 1999.

When the course started in 2005, it included four members of the Chekhov group: Pauline Snowie, Joycelyn Maclean, Jan Druce and Pat Brown. We were lucky to have Joycelyn as Class Treasurer for 12 years and Pauline is still a valued member. The others left for health reasons. From an initial enrolment of 16, the class has grown to 40+ in recent years when we have had waiting lists. Numbers decline somewhat during the winter months when many people like to go north or overseas to escape the Canberra winter. It's been a female dominated group with only a few courageous men joining for brief periods many years ago. Currently, the age range is from the early 60s to 91, with most probably being in their 70s. Many are ex-teachers.

The group meets once a week on Tuesday mornings from 10 am to 12 noon for three or four eight to ten week sessions a year. The initial venue was the Hughes Baptist Church Hall, but since 2006 it's been the Yarralumla Uniting Church Hall.