

NFO NEWS

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OF THE
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NATIONAL FOLK ORGANIZATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018

Pat Henderson, Orlando, Florida
Photos by Kathy Bruni

This year's annual NFO conference was held in Tenafly, NJ, April 26–28, in conjunction with the New Jersey Folk Festival on April 28. The event began with a joint board/membership meeting on Thursday at the Church of the Atonement in Tenafly.

That evening, we were entertained by Steve Weintraub and his Klezmer band. He led us through some Yiddish party dances that were easy to follow and then shared several Israeli dances with an international flavor. He taught an Israeli Krakowiak and also a square dance called Sher. Bobby and I had learned that one decades ago. In our square were Jim Gold and Roo Lester. It was quite strange to learn a dance with your previous teachers! With Ed Austin and Steve Kotansky, four attendees were previous workshop teachers at our Florida Workshop.

On Friday, there were several programs on tap, starting with the keynote address by Allegra Fuller Snyder. We later found out that she is the daughter of Buckminster Fuller. She is a dance ethnologist and Professor Emerita at UCLA, where she was instrumental in developing the Dance Ethnology program. She shared her life influences and her focus on dance and culture after starting as a ballet dancer.

Next, Jeanette Geslison, the Artistic Director of the Brigham Young Folk Dance Program, shared the details of a project where dance students from Minzu University in China shared a dance suite with the BYU Folk Dancers in their annual "Christmas Around the World" concert. It was inspiring to see the video summarizing the project and see the students share so much together, in spite of language differences. Dance is its own language.



Glyn Webber

Glyn Webber from Columbia, Maryland, shared how his group has members who meet weekly to organize music into their gigantic MP3 database. He recommended that you pick your software wisely; he likes MuzicMan and the MIT program. Some dances have duplicates in different versions and speeds. For example, Bucimis had 27 entries, so he put a star by the favorite one.

After lunch, Ethel Raim lead a Balkan singing workshop. Ethel is the Artistic Directory of the New York Center for Traditional



Allegra Fuller Snyder



Jeanette Geslison

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THE MANY FACES OF MARY BEE

NFO President Greg Lund, Eaton, Indiana

As most of you know, Mary Bee Jensen, one of the founders of the National Folk Organization (NFO), passed away recently at age 100. If you had the opportunity to know her, you may have only known her from one perspective. I thought it would be interesting if you could know other sides of Mary, so I asked a few people to contribute short articles about Mary, telling us how they knew her and a little bit about this lady, who was so instrumental in the formation of the NFO.



My personal experiences with Mary Bee covered the full spectrum. As a student, she was my teacher. As a dancer, she was my director. When the dance bug really hit me and I decided to pursue dance as a career, she was my mentor, and later, when I became President of the BYU Folk Dancers and eventually an Assistant Director of the Company, she was my colleague. And finally, after moving to Indiana and beginning my own career as a dance teacher and folk dance company director, she continued to provide insight and guidance to me, and of course, to encourage me to become an active part of the NFO, and hopefully catch a vision of what the NFO could become.

Her guidance and encouragement were an essential part in taking me, a non-dancer (actually a math major) from nowhere, to a pretty successful career in folk dance that lasted 40-plus years. And it was her gentle prodding that got me started in the governance of the NFO. While the NFO may not have continued in the direction she

originally envisioned, who can argue with the current success of the organization? And who can argue that Mary Bee was a pretty amazing pioneer?

Thank you, Mary, for your help in so many areas.

IN MEMORY OF MARY BEE

Virginia Topitzes, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Mary Bee Jensen and I were aware of each other's work in the folk dance field for many years through Vyts Belijus and Viltis magazine. We first met face-to-face in early 1976 in Las Vegas, where the Brigham Young University Folk Dancers were performing. I and two other people from Holiday Folk Fair (HFF) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were sent to audition the dancers' performance and to subsequently invite them to perform at HFF in November 1976, as part of a bicentennial program of the USA independence celebrations that year. The BYU Dancers performed an Americana suite of dances, along with the many other ethnic performing groups from Milwaukee. The multiple programs were well received by HFF audiences numbering in the thousands over a three-day weekend.

At the time of the founding of NFO, I was contacted by Mary Bee Jensen to attend the first meeting in Salt Lake City, along with a number of other festival directors in the USA, folk dance magazine publishers, and other well-known teachers of folk dance. The history of the NFO is recorded in its meeting minutes, and stored at BYU.

In 1988, Mary Bee asked me to write a research paper on folk dance in the USA (specific topic provided), to be presented at the annual meeting of CIOFF (Council International Organization of Folk Dance and Folk Arts) in Seoul, Korea. She was the USA representative to CIOFF for many years. I accepted, and presented. She and I were roommates at a number of CIOFF conferences around the world. She was always energetic, moving like a "bee" from

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project to project, and/or person to person. She and a number of others helped form the USA delegation to CIOFF, which became part of the North American Sector (USA and Canada) to CIOFF.

Mary Bee was a visionary in the preservation and presentation of folk dance and folk arts, both in the USA and worldwide. She was a wonderful friend, and her vivacious presence will be missed by many.

REMEMBERING MARY BEE

Ed Austin, Provo, Utah



My wife Vickie and I have fond memories of Mary Bee Jensen. She was our director, an enthusiastic college mentor, and a good friend during our Brigham Young University years. As we returned to work in the BYU Department of Dance, Mary Bee was there to help us as we

settled into our new careers. In fact, it was Mary who showed us a piece of land she thought might be perfect for our new family home. We agreed, and today we still reside in the home we built. We gratefully remember many doors that Mary Bee opened to us through the BYU International Folk Dance program.

One of our favorite memories of Mary occurred in Romania in 1976, as our group impatiently waited for dinner. One of the students began making the water goblet “sing” by sliding a finger around the rim of the glass. Quickly, the entire group joined in. The room immediately filled with a glorious “hum,” which included the musical artistry of Mary’s glass. The waiter,



however, was not amused, as he quickly confiscated all of our glasses. Oh, well! We were just following the lead of our beloved director.

One of our fondest memories is the night I proposed to Vickie at Mary’s home in 1978. We had been invited, along with some other students, for a nice dinner.



As the evening went on, Mary excused herself to attend a BYU basketball game, and she left a few of us to enjoy her home for the rest of the evening. Her home overlooked all of Provo, and the scene was beautiful. I took the opportunity that evening to take Vickie out onto Mary’s balcony and propose.

Mary had a way of getting the “impossible” accomplished. When she retired and I was asked to direct the program, I was instructed by the Dean of the college to keep things running in the same manner Mary Bee had—proceed in the same direction, use the same methods, don’t stray from the path, etc. As I dutifully followed this directive and worked very hard to trace her footsteps, I quickly learned from my colleagues across campus that “Mary Bee might have done it that way, but you will follow correct procedures.” Mary was one of a kind, and she let few obstacles ever deter her from her goals, but I had to swiftly learn that the rules had changed for me and I would need to make the proper adjustments. Business as usual for Mary would not be allowed for me.

So you can see, our connection to Mary Bee went beyond folk dancing. She is part of the special and memorable fabric woven into our lives. Vickie and I will always be grateful for her friendship and generosity.

MARY BEE, SISTER OF THE HEART

Bobi Ashley, Redmond, Oregon

In addition to her students, Mary Bee has touched the lives of many others, and has been a great inspiration. I am one of those lucky ones. As a fairly new member of the NFO, I knew who Mary Bee was, and had seen her speak at NFO functions. As a founder of the NFO and the BYU touring

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MARY BEE JENSEN (Continued from page 3)

folk dancers, she was an icon, and a legend in her own time. I had never met her, and was pretty sure she had no idea who I was.

At one of the NFO conferences, Linda Lundgren surprised me by saying that Mary Bee wanted to be our roommate. Linda had been one of Mary Bee's dancers during the 1966 three-month tour to Portugal, France, Holland, Wales, England, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Greece. I was amazed that Mary Bee would want to room with us, and thought Linda was joking. It was no joke, and Mary Bee joined us that night. She was very down-to-earth and friendly, immediately putting me at my ease. Because of our mutual love of travel, we were soon sharing stories, laughing, and chatting like old friends.



Our friendship grew when Linda Lundgren, Karlene Kjerstin, Judy Bush, and Mary Bee came to my home in Oregon for a girlfriend retreat in May 2007. They were there to help me break in the dance floor in my new home. We danced, joked, played games, and had a tea party every afternoon. Mary Bee insisted on taking us all out to dinner at a restaurant in Bend to celebrate her 90th birthday. She seemed impressed that we would dance just for the fun and joy of it, and she mentioned once that she had never had girlfriends like us before. We all had so much fun during that visit that she invited us to her home in St. George for another retreat just five months later. We again enjoyed great company, shared laughter and dances, hiked, and explored the beautiful area around St. George. With these two wonderful experiences, we all grew quite close, and became "Sisters of the Heart" (SOTH).

One of my favorite Mary Bee stories (that I can share) occurred Sept. 27, 2012, about six weeks after her hip replacement at the age of 96. Karlene and I were in Salt Lake City for Pourparler, and we called Mary Bee, who was then living in Provo. We wanted to know if she would be joining us for the event. When she said she couldn't, we thought it was because she was still recovering from her operation, and was not yet mobile. No... that wasn't the

reason: she was packing for a trip to Washington, D.C., with friends; and was leaving the next day. When we expressed sadness that we wouldn't be seeing her, she suggested we have

lunch together. She then got in her car and drove from Provo to Salt Lake City, and met us at the restaurant. She got out of her car looking as if she'd just stepped out of a fashion magazine, with her hair and make-up done to perfection... walking with no problem, and without even a cane. Talk about impressive!



All I could say was: "Mary Bee, I want to be just like you when I grow up!!"

Mary Bee would call me periodically to hear about Bob's and my latest travel adventures. She encouraged me to write a book about them, as she continued to work on hers. She sent me a signed copy after hers was published, along with a precious note. Her book is one of my most prized possessions. After reading it, I decided she needed to know how she had affected the lives of some of her students she'd taken on tour. Knowing some of those dancers from the NFO and Stockton Folk Dance Camp, I contacted Laraine Miner (1964 tour); Linda Lundgren (1966 tour); Greg and Taunya Lund (1972 tour); Judy Bush (1975 tour); and Vickie and Ed Austin (1974, 1976, and 1977). I asked them to send me memories of their tour, and to tell what difference it has made in their lives. I got back some wonderful stories, and learned many new things about a lady I already considered amazing. I even learned that Ed proposed to Vickie on the balcony of Mary Bee's house, which overlooked the night lights of Provo. Doesn't that sound romantic? They also sent me photos from their tours.

Our gift for Mary Bee at her 100th birthday party was a picture book that included their stories.

My final visit with Mary Bee was last December. I'd flown to Utah to see "Christmas Around the World." Karlene and I went to pay her a visit, as she was recovering from pneumonia at her son's home. We expected her to be in bed. No... Mary Bee was up and dressed, with her hair done and makeup in place. She sat in the living room with us, as sprightly as ever, though looking a bit more fragile

than usual, an oxygen tube stretching into the other room. When we had to leave, she came out of the house to wave us good-bye from the porch. I jumped back out of the car to go and take a picture of her. Typical Mary Bee, she took the oxygen tube out of her nose, and held it in her hand while I took the picture. I love you, Mary Bee. You are not only my Sister of the Heart, but also my role model for growing old gracefully and graciously.



REMEMBERING MARY BEE

George Frandsen, Sequim, Washington

[Excerpted from an email George sent on April 15.] Mary Bee Jensen died Friday night. This is a very bittersweet death for those who loved Mary Bee. She was a few weeks shy of her 101st birthday. Her life was full of accomplishments, honors, and successes, and no one could think death robbed us of our time with her. Her dream was to bring the world's cultures to her students through the medium of folk dance, and she succeeded beyond even her own ambitious hopes and expectations. She touched the lives of thousands of students, and they, in turn, have influenced thousands more individuals. We will miss her contagious enthusiasm and near-limitless energy.

When she and I met for the first time to discuss founding a national folk organization, her goal was to bring people together. She fought to keep the NFO inclusive, and open to everyone with an interest in any aspect of folk dance, music, and folk culture. She never lost sight of this.

THOUGHTS ON MARY BEE

Elizabeth Hanley, State College, Pennsylvania

I love what George Frandsen had to say about Mary Bee! I was very pleased to be among the first invited group of dance personnel to put together the constitution, etc., of the NFO. We worked hard, but had fun doing it. What a great group with which to work! One of my former dancers even created our logo. Mary Bee was a gem.

1986 NFO FIRST MEETING; MARY BEE JENSEN, PRESIDENT

Roo Lester, Woodridge, Illinois

The first meeting of the National Folk Organization in Salt Lake City, Utah, with the theme of Sharing: Friendship and Leadership, was held in Springville and Provo, Utah, August 30–31, 1986. Nearly 40 people attended from many parts of the USA. The conference was held in conjunction with the Springville World Folkfest.

The NFO was congratulated during the opening address at the Springville Art Gallery by Dr. Clayne R. Jensen, Dean of the College of Physical Education at Brigham Young University, for bringing together so many talented experts in their fields, with common interest in producing a national network.

At the helm the first year were President Mary Bee Jensen; George M. Frandsen, Vice-President/Secretary; L. DeWayne Young, Vice-President/Secretary; and Vytautas F. Beliajus, Advisory Committee. Note: These people were also the founders of the NFO.

The meeting was lead by Mary Bee Jensen, who guided the group through discussions of areas of focus for the budding NFO. These areas included:

1. Maintaining a directory containing a national registry of folk performing groups with descriptions, a calendar of national and international festivals and ethnic events, lists of ethnic communities in the U.S., lists of resource people, organizations, videos, and publications.
2. Possible development of manuals on festival production, guidelines for bringing and sending groups abroad, funding resources, immigration contacts, and rules for the admission and caliber of foreign groups.
3. Viewing the NFO as a multi-faceted program with representatives from each of the 50 states.
4. Discussion of "spreading the word" and funding were also included.

Mary Bee Jensen helped shape the beginning of the NFO, and the initial directions the NFO would take. Her elegant, practical approach, foresight, and commitment to the folk arts are a gift she contributed to the organization.

Note: Roo writes that she was present at that first meeting, and several early meetings of the NFO.—*Editor*

CONFERENCE (Continued from page 1)



Ethel Raim

Music and Dance, formerly the Balkan Folk Arts Center, and she worked closely with Martin Koenig.

Murray Spiegel, NJ folk dancer, talked about the book he wrote, in which he took the four questions of the Passover seder and showed translations of them into 300 languages and codes. The book's title is *300 Ways to Ask the Four Questions*.

The last program was a discussion of folk dancing and YouTube, led by Steve Kotansky and Loui Tucker. In the end, we all agreed that you cannot always rely on the authenticity of a dance on YouTube. After dinner, we had an all-request dance party.

On Saturday, we started out with a dance workshop with Michael Ginsburg. Bobby and I had never seen him, but we knew his name. He is in a brass band and plays the trumpet. In fact, he supplemented the music after he taught us a dance. One of the dances was a Sborinka.



Murray Spiegel



While waiting for the rest of the workshop participants to arrive, Michael Ginsburg plays a tune on the trumpet, and dancers join in.

After that, Steve and Susan Kotansky presented an Albanian dance workshop, where they shared village dances that are commonly done.

After lunch, we attended the New Jersey Folk Festival in the gym of Tenafly Middle School. This is a festival that is



Steve and Susan Kotansky teaching Albanian dances

sponsored by a different NJ folk dance group each year. Each dance group contributes 6 or 7 dance suggestions in advance, which are curated by the host club and led by the contributing club. There were between 250 and 300 dancers there; during some dances, the circle filled the entire gym. We saw so many people we knew from previous dance events or from folk dance trips. It is amazing to see how dancers from all over the United States see the same dances presented and then end up keeping the same ones. In addition to dances, there were many tables of refreshments.



Dancing at the New Jersey Folk Festival

The finale of the NFO Conference was the Heritage Awards Banquet, which was held at the host hotel, the Clinton Inn Hotel in Tenafly. Allegra Snyder and Ethel Raim each received the Preserving Our Heritage award for their contributions. After the dinner, we ended the event with some request dancing.

It was announced that next year's NFO Conference will be in Provo, Utah, April 11–14. I am making reservations now! It will probably involve some BYU dancers! For more information on NFO and pictures of this year's event, visit: www.nfo-usa.org.



AMERICAN AND CHINESE STUDENTS JOIN TOGETHER FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Jeanette Geslison, Provo, Utah

Dancers and musicians from Brigham Young University (BYU) and Minzu University (MUC) engaged in a cultural exchange that culminated in a collaborative dance work entitled “Encounter.” The goal for this project was to bring East and West together to foster the discovery of new artistic ways to identify cultural differences and similarities of Chinese and American dance and music expressions. The work allowed students and audience members to bridge the aesthetic of East and West, while increasing an understanding and appreciation of different cultures and human values.

BYU department professor Jiamin Huang already had a working relationship with the MUC College of Dance and with International Folk Dance Ensemble director Jeanette Geslison. Together, they pursued this artistic collaboration and extended an invitation to MUC in 2016.

In May of 2017, Huang and Geslison traveled to Beijing, China, and spent one week collaborating with two dance faculty and setting the choreography for “Encounter” on 20 MUC dancers.

The BYU International Folk Dance Ensemble worked to learn, rehearse, and prepare the piece throughout the fall of 2017. MUC and BYU students finally met to combine the “Encounter” piece Nov. 26–Dec. 3, 2017.

However, before the MUC guests arrived, they encountered a stumbling block. Seven weeks before arrival, they were denied their applications for a United States B-visa. They were instructed that they should re-apply for P3-visa status. Time was a crucial component, so BYU hired an immigration agency in Washington D.C. to help expedite the petition process. All previous Chinese visiting students had come on B-visas. Things had changed. Needless to say, everyone involved was desperately worried. The main stage concert, “Christmas Around the World,” had been created around the theme of “East meets West.” As late as ten days before the arrival of the MUC guests, visas for the last of them were approved. The relief was palpable.

BYU and MUC rehearsals and performances were extremely successful and impactful, not only for the students, but also for audience members who attended. This included:

1. A lecture/demonstration by the Minzu faculty and students, which included explaining and showing different Chinese minority dance styles and daily exercises to train their students. Minzu University is

well recognized for its prestigious Chinese minority dance program.

2. A matinee performance of “Christmas Around the World” for 5,000 local school children.
3. Three main-stage performances of “Christmas Around the World” for 8,600 audience members. The Minzu students performed three Chinese minority dance works in addition to the international repertoire in the concert. The BYU and MUC collaborative dance work “Encounter” was the final piece.

Encounter was shaped and produced to investigate traditional American and Chinese dance forms side by side. This work combined 20 dancers and five musicians from Minzu University with 20 dancers and seven musicians from BYU to discover and bridge the aesthetic of East and West. The work comprised three sections. The first displayed the Minzu men representing the traditional Tibetan minority dance tradition and technical movement intrigue. The second section showcased the traditional



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American clogging dance tradition by the BYU women. The interesting cultural diversity between the dynamic eastern tradition of technical feats and the vivacious and lively rhythmic beat of the West was visibly and spiritually apparent when shown side by side. The third section combined the two aesthetics of eastern and western characteristics as they “tried on” each other’s movement and “encountered” to exchange *Haddas* and cowboy hats as a token of friendship and respect.



International students’ exposure and new friendships quickly became the center of this project. Discovery of new perspectives facilitated appreciation to bridge human values. Working together cross-culturally in the choreographic process was invigorating and expanding as new ideas formed and viewpoints widened.

Benefits to the student performers were profound and powerful. Students learned that “strangers” can come together and touch hearts and make something powerful through creativity, art, and friendship. The students learned that differences don’t prevent kinship. They learned that love and humor transcend language and culture. The students understood the importance of their feelings and experiences, and they desired for everyone to have the same experience. They understood that love and friendship

developed in a cross-cultural experience can change the world. It benefited the students’ awareness of traditional dance beyond Utah in a real physical sense, as it increased their global appreciation.



“Even though they can’t speak English and I can’t speak Chinese, we still have a fun time. Even though we come from completely different sides of the world and have completely different cultures, we still value dance and

they value dance. It’s this beautiful art that connects people around the world.” —Ken Nukaya, BYU dancer.

“You can connect through having fun, through dancing, through laughing, and through teaching each other. We’re learning from and with each other. There are some moves my partner has to ask me to show him the footwork for, and I have to ask him how to do the Chinese moves right for other parts, and it all works out. I am so impressed with their choreography and how fast they have picked up the American choreography, as well.” —Alli Moon, BYU dancer.

“Anytime I have experiences like this, I’m always reminded that the world is a lot bigger than Provo, Utah, and that there are a lot of really talented people in the world. It’s inspiring to me that there is all this talent in the world and it makes me want to go see it and explore it.” —McCall McClellan, BYU dancer.

In addition, the benefit to the faculty included the opportunity to grow as professional artists and choreographers. The benefit to audience members was the privilege of witnessing an entire Chinese dance and music ensemble as special guests of a main-stage BYU production. They saw the Chinese and American cultures side by side and learned that two such opposite aesthetics can come together and work and learn from each other. They learned that each culture can be appreciated for its unique human values, and they saw and felt the powerful connection between the two.

The benefit to the discipline of traditional dance and music was the realization that a project this scope can be done. It is eye-opening to witness the skill it takes for someone to be expert in their discipline. It is a lesson that artists should not be afraid of combining opposite aesthetics. One opposite can complement and enhance the other.