

Anthony 'Tony' Shay

Dr. Anthony 'Tony' Shay is a committed academician, and prolific choreographer, and writer with numerous books and papers to his credit.

While in college, several life-changing events occurred. Tony learned he had a gift for language and became proficient in Persian language, culture, music and poetry. The second important element was discovering folk dance.

Tony was inspired and captivated by the music and choreographies of the visiting performing groups including Kolo, Tanec and Moiseyev Ensembles.

Tony danced and performed with the Gandy Dancers, the Village Dancers of UCLA and later choreographed for the Village Dancers. In 1963 he created the Aman International Folk Ensemble and was joined by Leona Woods as a co-director.

I would like to add, that I learned a lot and had a wonderful time dancing in Aman. The breadth of cultures and dances as well as performing under Tony's direction was amazing.

Later Tony went on to create the AVAZ International Dance Theater in 1977.

Some fun Tony facts:

- He loves combining scholarship with the 'nerdy' stuff of being a choreographer.
- Dance and music has been his ticket to 'riches' and fulfillment.
- He is proud to have made a transition from performance to academic life.
- For his PhD, Tony used the material of his youth and looked at it from a different set of lenses.

NFO member, Katherine St. John contributed the following memories and stories from her connections with Shay.

The first time I visited Tony's home in Hollywood Hills, in the 1980s, I was so impressed with the number of opanci he had in one room. But even more striking was the beautiful home and décor, the random chess sets, Russian, Croatian and Persian books placed on various corners and tables. It was an inspiring feeling which only increased as I attended my first AVAZ concert at Pepperdine. As a student of Persian language and literature myself, and a dancer, I was impressed at the research, the detail, the dedication he and others at AVAZ had put into a stunning performance of Persian traditional and classical arts. To top it all off, Tony sang a Persian song in the concert which struck my heart, as a student of the language at that time.

I've always appreciated Tony's honesty, confidence, and can-do approach to any endeavor. It was Tony who encouraged me to apply for the PhD in Dance History

and Theory at UCR with my research on dance of Afghanistan in the early 1990s. We attended several classes together, and Tony excelled as a true scholar. I remember a long car drive we made together to a conference in the first days of my attendance at University of California Riverside during which he coached me on grad school jargon and how to approach theory in the field of dance. I also recall one particular class we took together with Linda Tomko in which our task was to decipher dance notation from, I believe, the Baroque period. As partners, we had to demonstrate what we determined from the notation. Fun and challenging, Tony was confident and up to the task as I stumbled along. These moments make me smile as I have always looked up to him and learned from him. AVAZ rehearsals were educational, enjoyable and spending time with Tony and Jamal has been a gift. Their lavish book collection, a veritable library, at their home rivals any you can imagine.

Somewhat coincidentally, Tony visited Iran at the time Lloyd's [Katherine's husband] family was serving a two-year assignment in Tehran in the late 1950s and Lloyd's mother remembers a young Anthony Shay as being very excited about all things Persian.

Dr. Lloyd Miller and I extend sincere congratulations, love and best wishes to our dear friend, Dr. Anthony Shay as a merited recipient of the NFO Preserving Our Heritage Award.

If you would like to learn more about Anthony 'Tony' Shay, I suggest that you talk with him this evening, read some of his books and articles and bios, including the one written by Dick Oakes with some fun anecdotes.

This evening we honor Anthony Shay with the National Folk Organizations "Preserving Our Heritage" Award.