

## **Martin Koenig**

*I had the pleasure of meeting Martin Koenig and taking dance classes with him while I was a grad student UCLA.*

*The selection of dances he presented, his teaching methods and the remarkable music he used created a fantastic atmosphere for the dances taught.*

*Martin's passion, his interest, his enthusiasm, and presentation approach are such that one can take away much more than just a dance when he teaches.*

Martin Koenig was born in New York City to parents who emigrated from what was then Poland and is now Ukraine. After graduating from the City University of New York Martin worked as a teacher in history and dance.

A student attending his folk-dance group suggested that Martin go to Bulgaria and learn some dances there. A number of visits to the Balkans followed.

In 1965 Martin and his colleague Ethel Raim created the Balkan Art Centre, later known as the Centre for Traditional Music and Dance in New York; an organization that works with community-based traditional artists, especially those active in urban immigrant ethnic enclaves throughout the United States. Their extensive research led to the production of audio recordings, films and videos as well as the curating of concerts and festivals.

Today, Martin is a leading supporter and advocate for community-based traditional arts and an authority on European ethnic dance traditions.

Martin & Ethel's recording of Valya Balkanska's singing was later selected by Carl Sagan to be included on the Golden Record sent aboard the Voyager spacecraft as a musical message from the earth to other life forms. The original recording is included on disc 2 of the CD set with his new Bulgarian book.

A number of people worked with and facilitated Martin's studies and research in Bulgaria and the Balkans. Both Margaret Mead and Alan Lomax wrote letters supporting his research as well as numerous people in Bulgaria who helped Martin pursue his research.

I received this email from Larry Weiner: And I quote "I thought I'd write something about Marty that many folk dancers probably didn't know about.

Martin was an incredibly creative folk festival organizer and curator; and he was always most interested in involving folks from the local ethnic communities.

In the early/mid 1970s he and Ethel Raim developed a new festival concept for the Smithsonian Institute's annual Festival of American Folklife

The program was called "Old Ways in the New World".

As many of you may know, Marty had worked with various immigrant Balkan communities in the USA, and the idea behind the "Old Ways in the New World" programs was to bring village people from the "old country" (e.g., Yugoslavia and Greece) and "marry" them with their counterparts from their respective ethnic communities in the USA.

As a Washington, DC resident I was lucky enough to be able to attend these events, and all of these programs were enlightening and joyful.” Unquote.

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In mid-September 2019 Martin Koenig opened his photo exhibition, entitled '20th Century. Balkan echo. Sounds and Images from Bulgaria', at the National Art Gallery in Sofia.

And just last year Martin Koenig received the Bulgarian Presidential Medal of Honor for his work to preserve Bulgarian folklore.

During an interview with Europost Martin discussed **Folk Dancing keeps your brain alive.** By dancing, you think in ways crucial to brain health.

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In Sound Portraits from Bulgaria Martin writes: “It is my fervent wish that these recordings and photographs have sufficient eloquence to convey the vitality and lyricism of that former world – the life force expressed through its traditional culture and the sense of place; through the eyes, the smiles, the energy – that have remained unforgettable to me.”

Tonight, Thursday March 5, 2020 we present Martin B Koenig with the National Folk Organizations Preserving our Heritage Award.

Roo Lester with Jo Crawford and Taunya Lund