

# MACEDONIAN FOLK DANCING



an interview with

## PECE ATANASOVSKI

by

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-- INTRODUCTION --

PETRE VASILEV ATANASOVSKI ("Pece", pronounced Petseh) did not have to "study" Macedonian music or folklore. He was born into a musical Macedonian family and grew up playing the native instruments, the gajda (bagpipe) and the kaval or šupelka, from the age of five or six.

Pece lived in the village of Dolneni, near Prilep, until serving in the army from 1944 to 1947. He then went to work in Skopje, becoming active as a dancer in various amateur ensembles outside the city, including one in his own village, where he was the leader at various festivals in 1947.

During the postwar period, there was a resurgence of national feeling in Yugoslavia. A number of village groups held festivals; traditional costumes were worn; and traditional dances and songs were performed regularly.

In 1950, Pece joined the budding state ensemble, *Tanec*, as a dancer. Later, he became the ensemble's gajda player as well. *Tanec* performed throughout the world, including, in 1956, the United States. In 1960 Pece became the Director of the Orchestra of Folk Instruments of *Radio-Televizija-Skopje*, a group which began as part of *Tanec*, under the direction of Dr. Firfov. Pece is also currently Director of the amateur ensemble *Makedonija*. Since 1970, he and Dr. Firfov have held summer seminars on the dances and songs of Macedonia at Oteševo, on Lake Prespa.

Pece and his wife, Cena, have two daughters, Vesna and Suzana.

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This interview was given November 25, 1972, at the University of San Francisco KOLO FESTIVAL, where Pece was the featured instructor. Robert Leibman, Department of Folklore, UCLA, was the interviewer and translator. Questions are in capital letters. Pece is at far left in the picture on Page 4.

ARE THERE PLACES IN MACEDONIA WHERE AMERICANS CAN PARTICIPATE IN FOLK DANCING?

First, there's the course in Oteševo, which is run by myself and Dr. Zivko Firfov, in southern Macedonia. It involves theory and practice, both dance and song.

DOES THIS COURSE RUN ALL YEAR LONG?

No, it's just a ten-day course. It will run from July 9th this year. You can contact me [Editor has the address]. That's going to be in its fourth year.

At the same time, in Ohrid, which is near Oteševo, is the Balkan Folklore Festival; you can't participate, but it would be interesting to see. It runs from the 3rd to the 8th of July, and the night of the 2nd, when people could dance. It's a real dance, a regular gathering.

WHAT ABOUT JUST GOING TO THE VILLAGES?

IS THAT DIFFICULT FOR THE AVERAGE AMERICAN FOLKDANCER?

Of course, you can go anywhere you want in Yugoslavia, freely. However, to go to a village, you would have to find out when they were dancing. The actual truth, which I can tell you, is that any one village may dance five or six times in a whole year, maybe less.

HOW IMPORTANT IS STYLING TO THE MACEDONIAN DANCER?

Each Macedonian dance has a deep, long history. As soon as you understand the history, you automatically have the style. Women's styling has its own characteristics.

THEN IT COMES RATHER NATURALLY TO THE MACEDONIAN DANCER?

HE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TAUGHT?

Well, nobody teaches anybody anything in the villages.

DO AMERICAN DANCERS PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION TO STYLING?

I am very happy with the way Americans have taken to folklore. There are some people who are very interested in dance styling. There are some people, I could name seven or eight, who could direct dancers about styling, if not perfectly, then very close. They really deeply understand.

However, it's a terrible shame that many instructors don't know or don't tell the history of dances. They probably don't know or mis-know and give the wrong information about a lot of dances. They're not really knowledgeable and often do a lot of fantasising in the dances that they teach for financial gain. People here should demand that instructors be able to demonstrate the authenticity of their material and should talk about the history of the dances.

HOW CLOSELY DOES STYLING DEPEND ON TERRAIN?

It's not so much the place, the mountain or the valley, but rather, it's the clothes. If you live in the mountainous area, you would wear much more; this would restrict your movements. It would be rather impossible, for instance, for someone from a mountainous area to do *Čačak*, which is a very fast dance. Styling is dependent on climate as it affects clothing, and on clothing as it affects movement.

DO YOU LIMIT YOUR RESEARCH TO JUGOSLAV MACEDONIA?

For Macedonians, there is only one Macedonia. There is no Greek Macedonia, no Bulgarian Macedonia. It's all one, and always will be. National boundaries are just political. Other countries in the area feel the same way. They all think they should own themselves. However, the Bulgarians think that the Macedonians are Bulgarians.

ARE THERE INFLUENCES WHICH TEND TO CHANGE OR MODERNIZE THE TRADITIONAL DANCES?

In the villages, everybody's an individual, so things change sometimes, and sometimes they don't. But on stage, they're doing the same things that choreographers would do here---they change the dances. I do not especially like this.

ARE NEW DANCES BEING COMPOSED?

I don't know if they're being composed, but there are influences. There are newer dances. *U Sest*, and dances like that, are done in Macedonia now. That's a (southward) movement.

Where you may have had a hundred older dances, now you have many fewer. Traditional dances are not done as much as before. But they still do them. Researching the traditional forms of the dance is still possible. If you want to talk about "living folklore" and "non-living", it's much more "alive" in Macedonia than in most other areas. But I hope you have no idea of the 'primitive Macedonian peasant'. It just doesn't exist. Many people are using old instruments, however.

ARE THE VILLAGERS THEMSELVES INTERESTED IN PRESERVING THE TRADITIONS, OR IS THIS MORE AN ACADEMIC EFFORT?

Some are, some aren't. Most are not aware of "preserving" tradition.

DO MACEDONIAN DANCERS WANT TO LEARN FOLKDANCES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?

No, only Yugoslav folklore. There's no particular institute for other dances; it's not officially done. Someplaces, they learn other dances, if they want. But what you conceive of as folkdancing here has no reality in Yugoslavia, absolutely.

Dances have long histories; the beginnings of these dances are unknown. There have been many cross-currents and different influences, so nobody knows whether it's a Rumanian dance or a Turkish dance or whatever. And no one cares, either, because of course, to the villager, it's a dance, that's all. He doesn't care where it came from.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THE UNITED STATES?

The people, especially seeing the people I met 15 years ago, while here with Tanec. My reception has been very warm. Also, seeing the people who have visited me in Yugoslavia.

